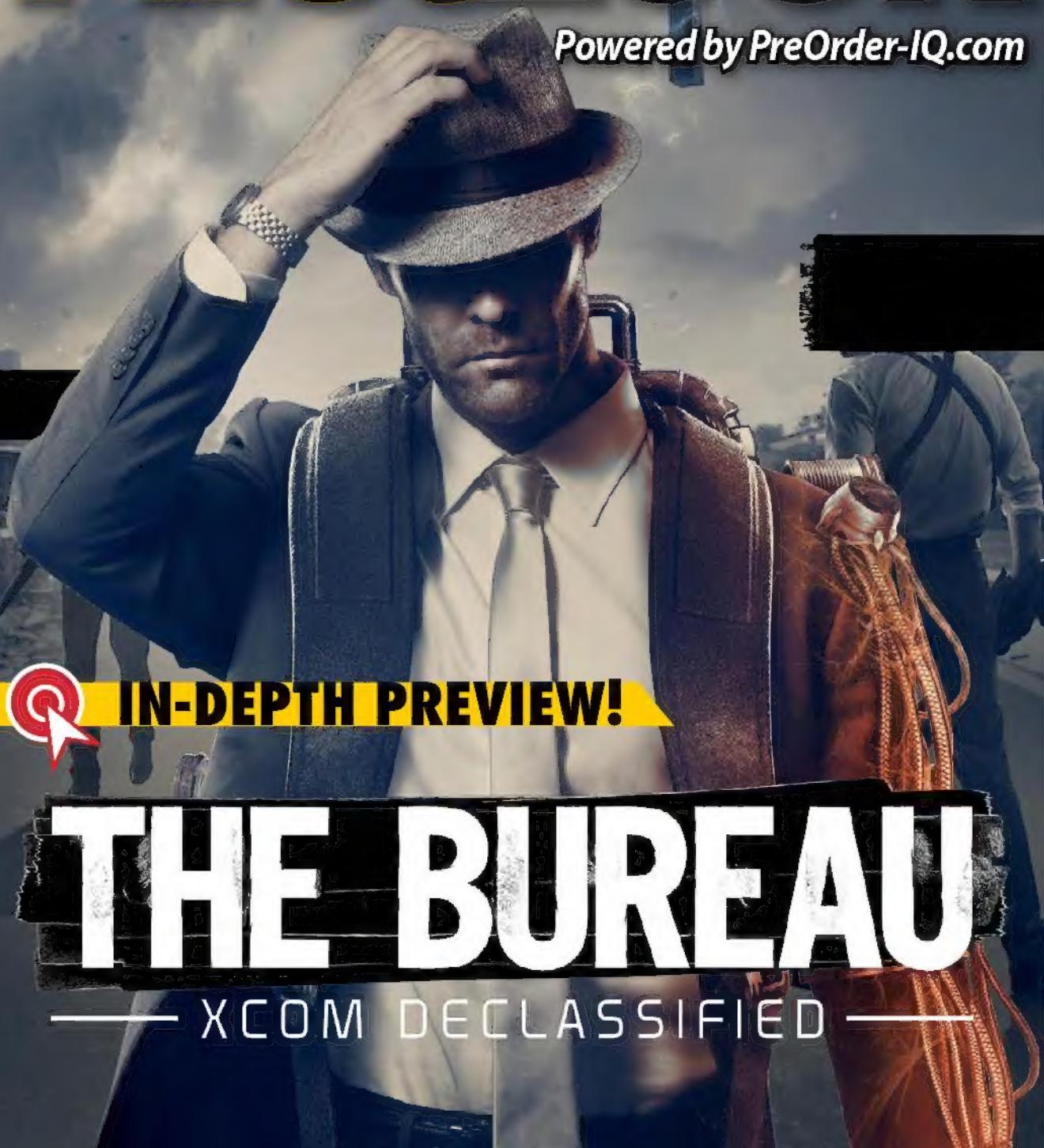


GamerZines

ISSUE 08 | SEPTEMBER 2013

First Look

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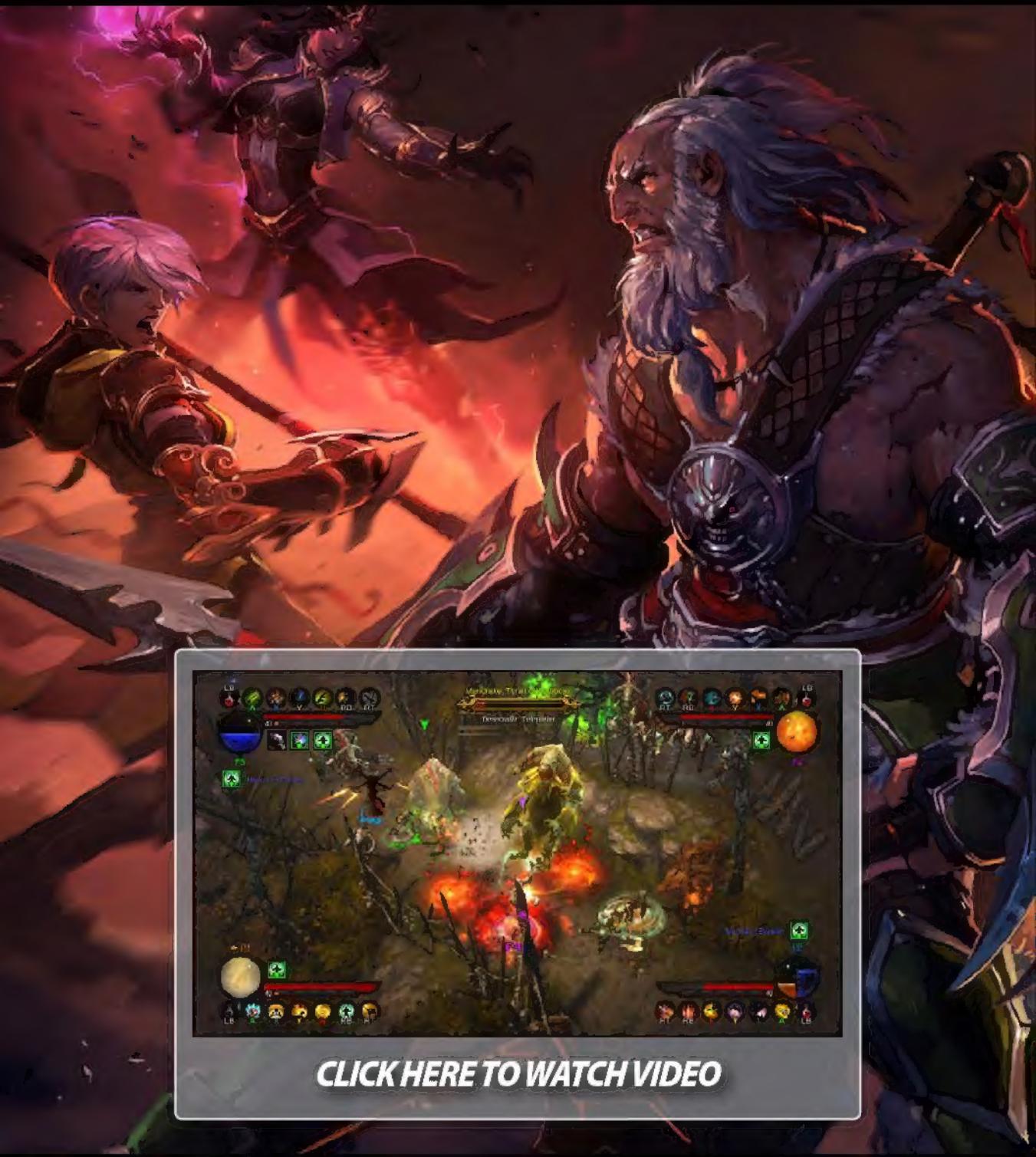


IN-DEPTH PREVIEW!

THE BUREAU

— XCOM DECLASSIFIED —

DIABLO



FirstLook |



WELCOME TO FirstLook



Tackling a game franchise which isn't your own must be very intimidating for any developer. Yet that's a scenario which 2K Marin has strangely become a specialist in, as not only did the studio have to muster the tricky challenge of producing

BioShock 2 with little input from original creator Irrational Games, but they're about to release an all-new XCOM experience, which is a startling contrast to the turn-based strategy series many gamers call their favourite. *The Bureau* has to work hard to win over those sceptical souls more so than anyone else, but sometimes even the most beloved of series need a new creative vision.

Aside from an extensive preview of the aforementioned prequel, we've also got two fascinating interviews with two of the best MMORPG developers in the business, along with a regular slate of previews, starring one of the most charming adventure games we've played in years.

Enjoy the issue.

Andy Griffiths, Editor
FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

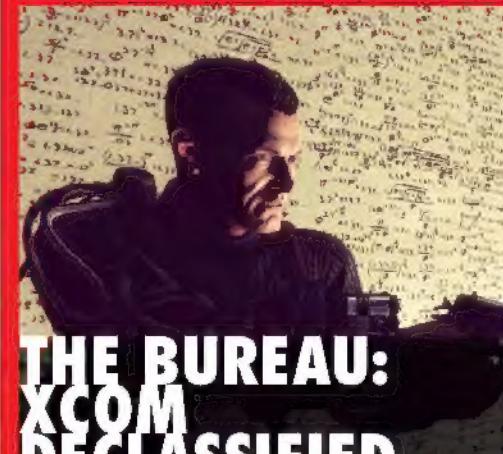
Still picking over some delectable pre-orders...



Andy Griffiths
Still doesn't know how to swim.

FirstLook | Contents

Don't miss!
This month's top highlights!



**THE BUREAU:
XCOM
DECLASSIFIED**



PAYDAY 2



**THE RAVEN:
LEGACY OF A
MASTER THIEF**



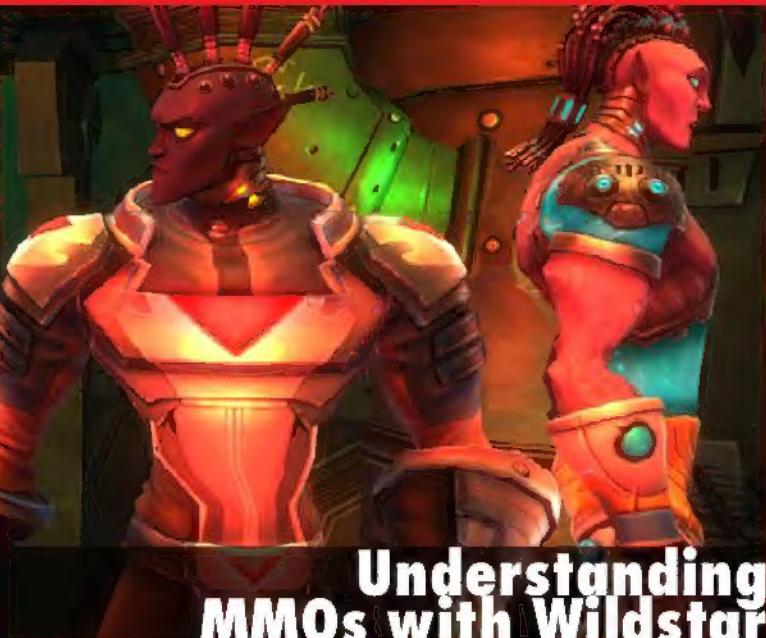
RISE OF VENICE

QUICK FINDER



[Strike Vector](#)
[FEAR Online](#)
[The Bureau:](#)
[XCOM](#)
[Declassified](#)
[The Raven:](#)
[Legacy of a Master Thief](#)
[PreOrder](#)
[Must Haves](#)

Revitalising RIFT: Why Trion went free-to-play



Understanding MMOs with Wildstar

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FirstLook |



TOTAL WAR ROME II

PREVIEW

STRIKE VECTOR

QUAKE SPLICED WITH X-WING

PUB: STRIKE
VECTOR TEAM
DEV: IN-HOUSE
PLAT: PC
ETA: 2014

TR
O
M

Genre tastes never disappear, they just fade into the background waiting to be awakened once more. Mech games are now back thanks to *Hawken* and *MechWarrior Online* and in our opinion, the air combat genre is next up for revival. *Strike Vector* is one title which will renew interest in this bygone taste, and it isn't hard to see where the four-man development team got their inspiration from. Games like *X-Wing versus Tie Fighter* and *Crimson Skies* are just two of the titles which spring to mind when watching their first exciting gameplay trailer. Pace of combat rivals that of *Quake* or *Unreal Tournament*, and players can

also customise their ships altering speed, manoeuvrability and weapon load out. Much like *Strike Suit Zero*, ships can also alternate between jet and stationary modes offering new combat abilities, which in turn allow traditionally more grounded game types like Capture the Flag and Domination to bolster out regular match type options.

Strike Vector doesn't have an single-player component, with the team instead entirely focused on making this release a competitive multiplayer phenomenon. That's a wise choice in our book, and as long as the game plays as good as it looks, we think this release could take the PC world by storm. God speed guys! ■



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OF THE
MONTH



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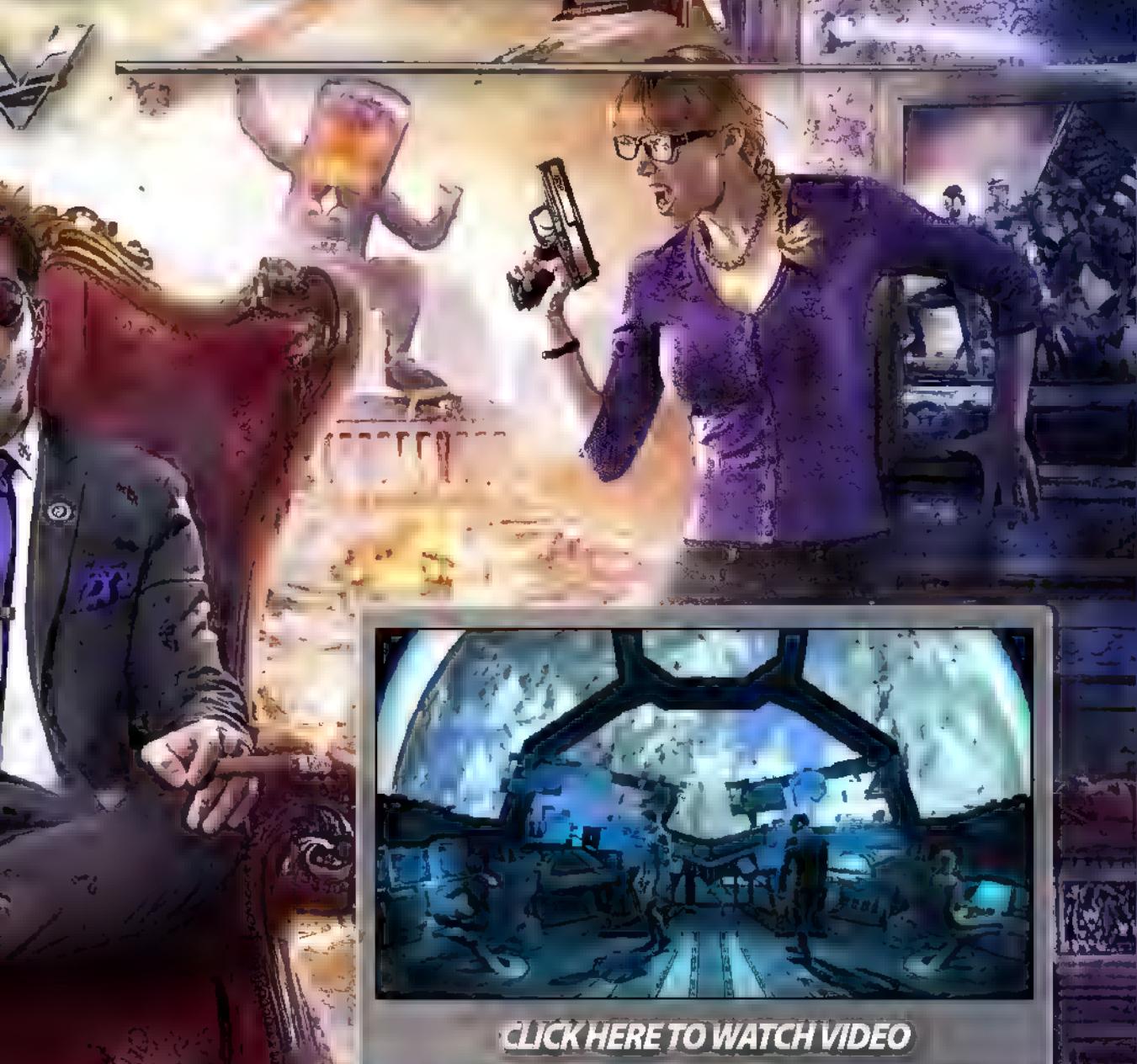


18™

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PROVISIONAL

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SROW



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END OF NATIONS

PUB: TRION WORLDS
DEV: IN-HOUSE (FORMERLY
PETROGLYPH GAMES)
PLAT: PC
ETA: 2013

AND NOW, YOU'RE A MOBA!

For all that is holy and tank-like, the free-to-play RTS *End of Nations* has morphed into something Trion Worlds are calling a 'MOBA RTS'. One second, let us check our Redundant Acronyms Chart. Okay we've got MM (Matrix Mod...) MOO (Master of Orion)... Oops, too far. Ah, here it is MOBA, Multiplayer Online Battle Arena. Wow that really is redundant. Regardless, *End of Nations* is apparently now a thoroughly different experience, with players choosing units to take to the

ever-changing online battlefield with potentially dozens of other players also joining the fight. Hang on, that's exactly how it was before.

The game's original developer Petroglyph has since been taken off the project by publisher Trion Worlds, who's own developers have given the game a new lick of paint, balanced the unit roster and added hero units, which can turn the tide of battle with different destructive abilities. We look forward to learning what really is different about this reboot soon. ■



Hero Promotion: Blur level 3
Stat boost

7

CAPTURED

TM
ST



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FirstLook |

TOM CLANCY'S PLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

COMING AUGUST 23RD



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FEATURING THE RETURN
OF SPIES VS. MERCS



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PREVIEW



FirstLook | Preview

F.E.A.R ONLINE

PUB: AERIA
DEV: INPLAY INT.
PLATFORM: PC
ETA: TBA

ALMA RETURNS... SORT OF

No franchise has become more sullied in recent times than *F.E.A.R.* The IP has changed hands between different publishers and studios with each new entry in the series, and the result of this rapid changing is that it's become practically impossible to figure out what is still going on in this original universe, and we suspect this new game won't make it any easier either.

F.E.A.R. Online is a multiplayer-only game which looks to expand the co-op and competitive online shooter angle approached in *F.E.A.R. 3* across 10 different maps and several different game modes, including 'Soul King'. Players will get to

revisit known locations in the series where they can fight one another for online bragging rights and loot to build new weapons and gear. All that doesn't really interest us, though.

What we're interested in is *F.E.A.R. Online*'s four-player co-op missions which run parallel to the events of *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin*. Inplay promises these new mini-campaigns will reveal more about spooky antagonist Alma and what happened to the rest of the *F.E.A.R.* squad. Here's hoping these little plot-driven vignettes will inspire the developer to go back to this series' still-thrilling roots and restore it to its former glory. ■



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IGN 8/10

FALLEN ENCHANTRESS: LEGENDARY HEROES IS A TERRIFIC 4X STRATEGY GAME!

GAMESPOT 8/10



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KILLER IS DEAD

Suda 51 strikes again!

Every gamer needs a fresh dollop of crazy now and then. With the blockbuster aspirations of so many designers muddying the creative waters with grounded scenarios and brown and grey colour palettes, it's always refreshing to sample an experience which shirks those tendencies to offer up an enemy that's wearing a golden mankini in his palatial abode – which happens to be located on the moon. Suda 51's games have

never preached realism. Uber violence, nudity and trash talk have been at the centre of all his games and we wouldn't change him for the world. He's different in the way we wish more developers would be, as you know when you're playing one of his games, even if you haven't spotted the Grasshopper logo. That's why *Killer is Dead* is a must play, as it's sure to be unlike anything else out there. Give it a try, it'll be good for you.



PUB: DEEP SILVER
DEV: GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
PLAT: XBOX 360, PS3
ETA: 30TH AUGUST

F1 2013



After some confusion, Codemasters has revealed exactly how they'll be adding historical content to their officially licensed F1 racer. There will be three packs in total: 1980s, 1990s and Classic

Tracks. All versions of *F1 2013* will include the 1980s content on disc, but the Classic Tracks and 1990s packs will be delivered post-launch via DLC. This delay should allow Codies to polish up the core game even further.

PUB: CODEMASTERS
DEV: IN-HOUSE
PLAT: XBOX 360, PC, PS3
ETA: 4TH OCTOBER

RAYMAN LEGENDS

Ubisoft attracted a lot of flack when they delayed the release of Wii U-exclusive *Rayman Legends* so that it could be retooled for a multi-format release on every platform that matters, but it

seems to have done the cute platformer a load of good. The sequel to *Rayman Origins* now boasts a range of extra modes and mini-games, offering players more value for money.



PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: IN-HOUSE
PLAT: XBOX 360, PC, PS3, WII U
ETA: 30TH AUGUST



TOTAL WAR: ROME II

PUB: SEGA
DEV: THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
PLAT: PC
ETA: 3RD SEPTEMBER

We're ready for *Rome II*'s impending launch. We've been reading the teachings of Marcus Aurelius all summer, we've upgraded our PCs with GTX Titans so that we bump up

the visual settings to max, and we've bought *Rome II*'s real-life Onager-boasting Collector's Edition, so we can fling rocks at each other in-game and in real life. Vade en pacem!

PUB: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT
PLAT: PC XBOX ONE, XBOX 360
ETA: WINTER 2014

Titanfall won a myriad of different awards at E3 2013 and we suspect that a similar number of plaudits will be heading Respawn Entertainment's way come gamescom. Mixing building-

sized mechs and agile humans in a single competitive multiplayer environment is something we've never seen before and it exudes in a way no other shooter has before.

TITANFALL



GRAND THEFT AUTO V



As much as we're looking forward to *GTA V*, we still can't believe that Rockstar has yet to confirm whether the sequel is coming to PC. Every *GTA* has come to PC eventually, so what's

PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEV: ROCKSTAR NORTH
PLAT: XBOX 360, PS3
ETA: 17TH SEPTEMBER

with all the secrecy? Over 250,000 gamers have signed a petition to get *GTA V* on PC, so Rockstar do the right thing and tell them of your real plans. It's time to speak up.



DIABLO III

PUB: ACTIVISION
DEV: BLIZZARD
PLAT: XBOX 360, PS3, PS4
ETA: 3RD SEPT

Last month we wrote at great length about how the console versions of *Diablo III* are better than their PC cousin, thanks to a cleaner interface, drop-in drop-out co-op, and the lack of any kind of real money auction house. Well, we still stand by that statement which is why *Diablo III* has made its way onto this list. Grab some mates and go questing!



PUB: 505 GAMES
DEV: TRICKSTER
PLAT: WII U, PC, PS3, XBOX 360
ETA: NOVEMBER

ASHES CRICKET 2013

505 Games has taken the decision to delay the release of *Ashes Cricket 2013* on all formats until November. The sports sim was expected to be released this July, but the publisher decided to allow Trickster more development time to improve the overall experience. Good things come to those who wait.

REVITALISING



TRION WORLDS EXPLAINS WHY THEIR SIGNATURE MMORPG



PUB: TRION WORLDS
DEV: IN-HOUSE
LAST GAME: DEFIANCE
PLATFORMS: PC
OUT NOW

RIFT is the most generous free-to-play MMORPG out there. Of all the formerly subscription-only titles, be it *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, *TERA*, *Lord of the Rings Online* or *Dungeons & Dragons Online*, RIFT is the only game which offers up the bulk of its previously released expansion content to fans for free, regardless if they shelled out real cash via the in-game store or not. No reduced XP accumulation, no shielding content from those who aren't willing to pay, apart from a few skill-allocating souls. Trion Worlds are committing to the fundamentals of

playing what you want and paying for what you want in a manner no other top tier studio is willing to risk. They're the kind of studio worth talking to then, not only about issues affecting RIFT but also the wider MMO landscape as a whole. We caught up with Senior Design Director Simon Finch for a fascinating 30 minutes where no subject was considered out of bounds, even the almighty question, how do you close an MMORPG?

First off though, we started with a slightly easier question. Why the move to free-to-play and what was it

RIFT WENT FREE-TO-PLAY

“It was like when servers opened to all in June?”

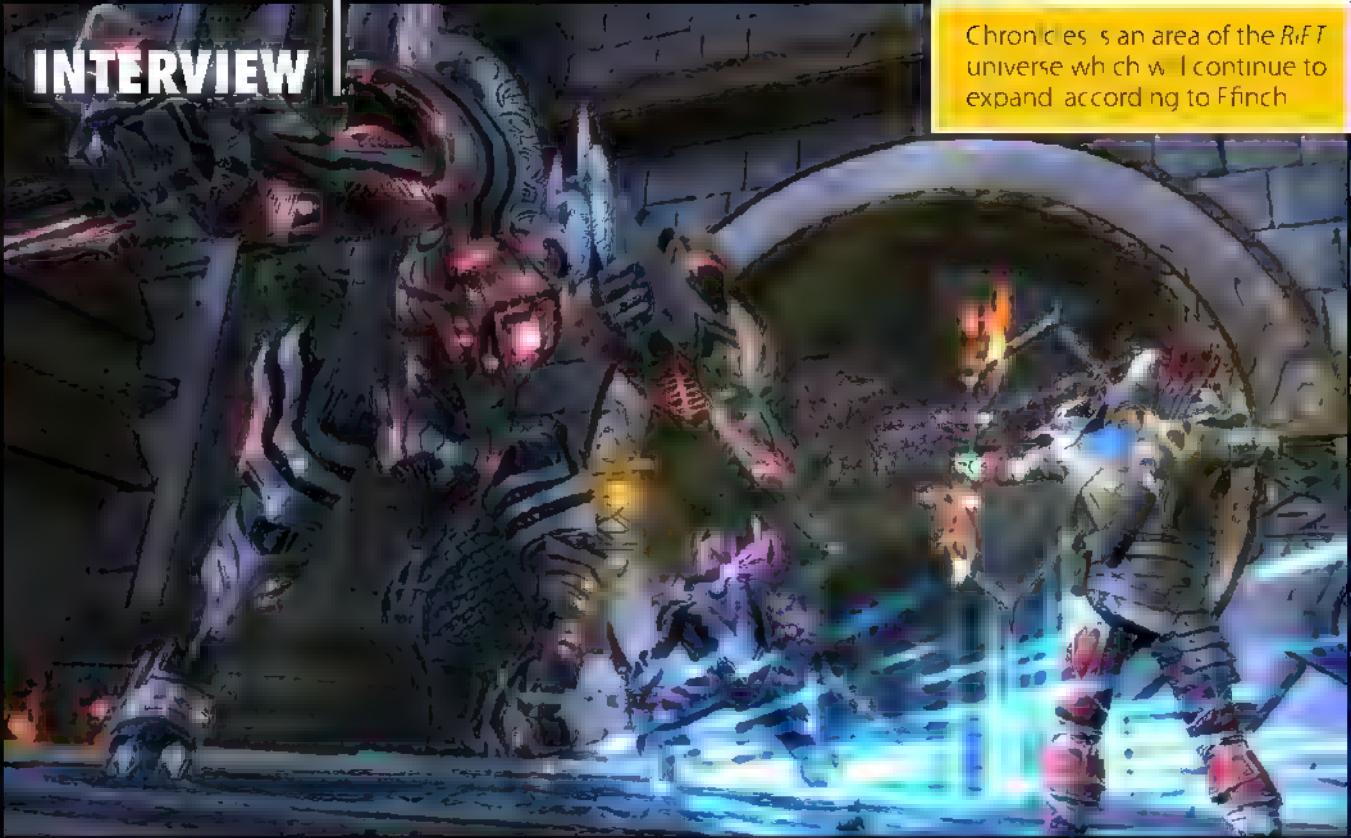
“We just wanted to remove the barrier to entry that we had in RIFT. It was like opening the floodgates, it was pretty amazing. Oh I've heard this game is good and let's try it, now that it's free. It's amazing how powerful that word free is. You can say you've got a trial or RIFT Lite and you can try it up to level 20 but that isn't the same as saying it's all free,” Finch explained in a typically excited tone.

“All I'll say is that it [the free-to-play transition] has been really



INTERVIEW

Chronicles is an area of the Rift universe which we continue to expand according to Finch



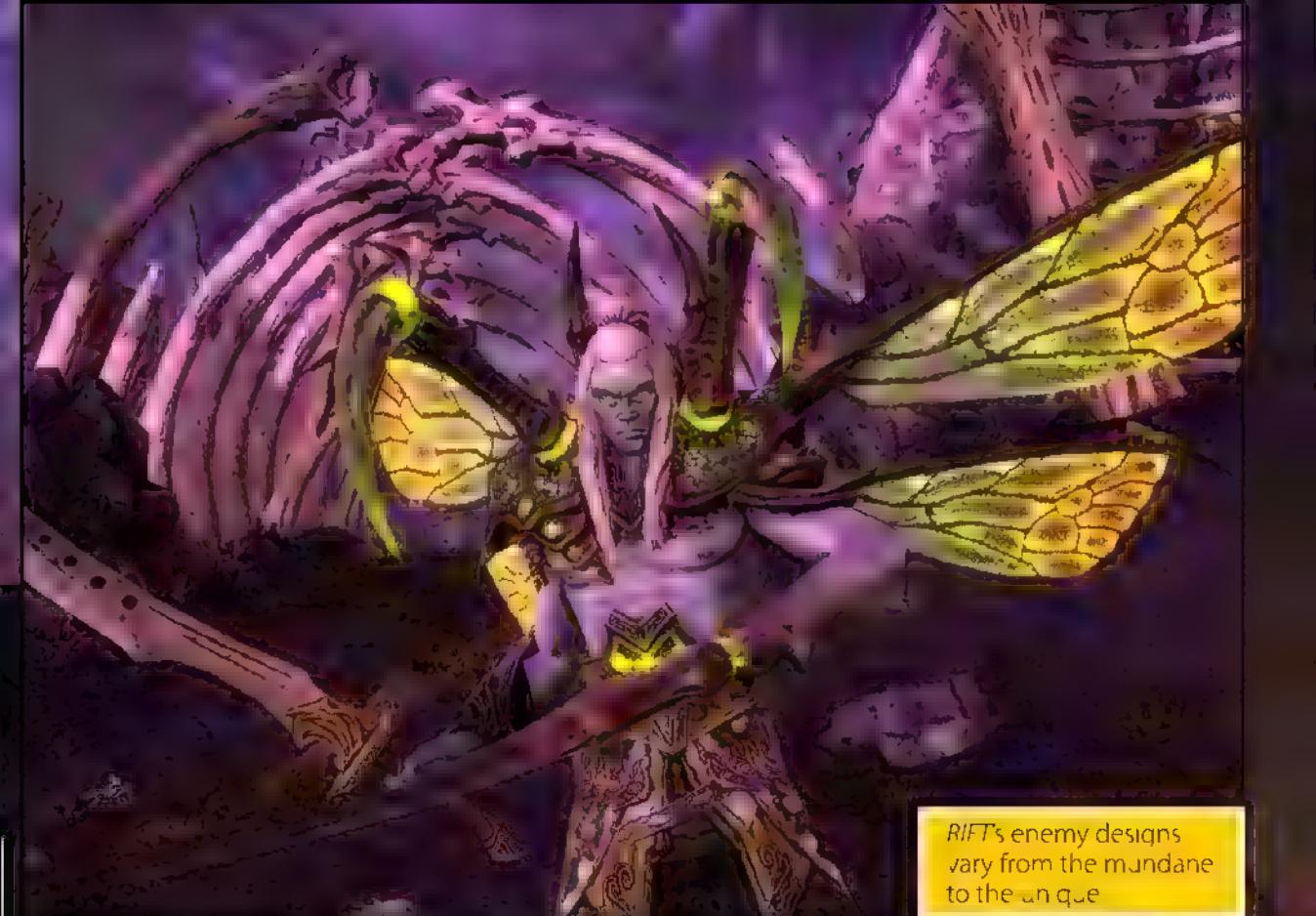
Holiday themed events will remain on the calendar

exciting, and has far exceeded our expectations and continues to do so. We thought we were going to see a lot of people leave, that were going to be upset by it, but I'm happy to say that didn't happen.

"Free-to-play doesn't mean what it used to. You still get people who cry, 'Oh my god, the sky is falling' when free-to-play is mentioned, but it's far more accepted that this is the way games should be going forward."

Trion Worlds has already mentioned that Rift will be getting another *Storm Legion*-sized expansion in the future, but it won't be delivered in the same way as before.

"Internally we are working on an expansion, but we won't be launching it in the classic way. It won't be in a box, we won't charge for it; it'll just be free! It'll show up in a patch and you can go there if you want. It does come with four more souls and



RIFT's enemy designs vary from the mundane to the unique

we will certainly be putting those on the store for purchase. Again, they aren't required. You can still play with the souls that you have, but all of the areas that you can go to, the dungeons you explore, the raids you

"The dungeons you explore, the raids you do – all that stuff will be free"

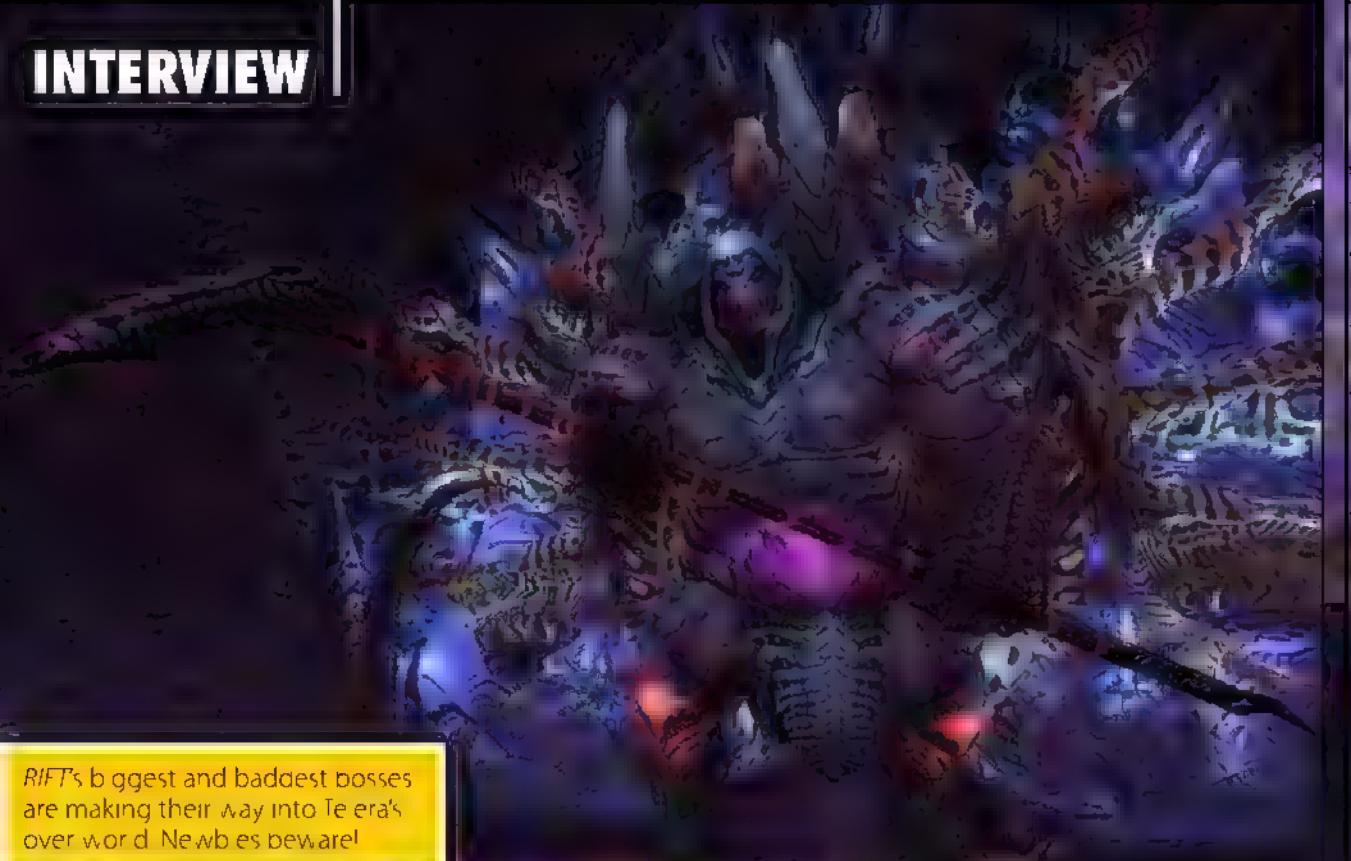
do – all of that stuff will be free.

Trion Worlds' commitment to future free expansions is bonkers quite frankly, but it speaks volumes to the number of players currently using the in-game store and how powerful RIFT's soul-based skill system is in tempting players to part with their

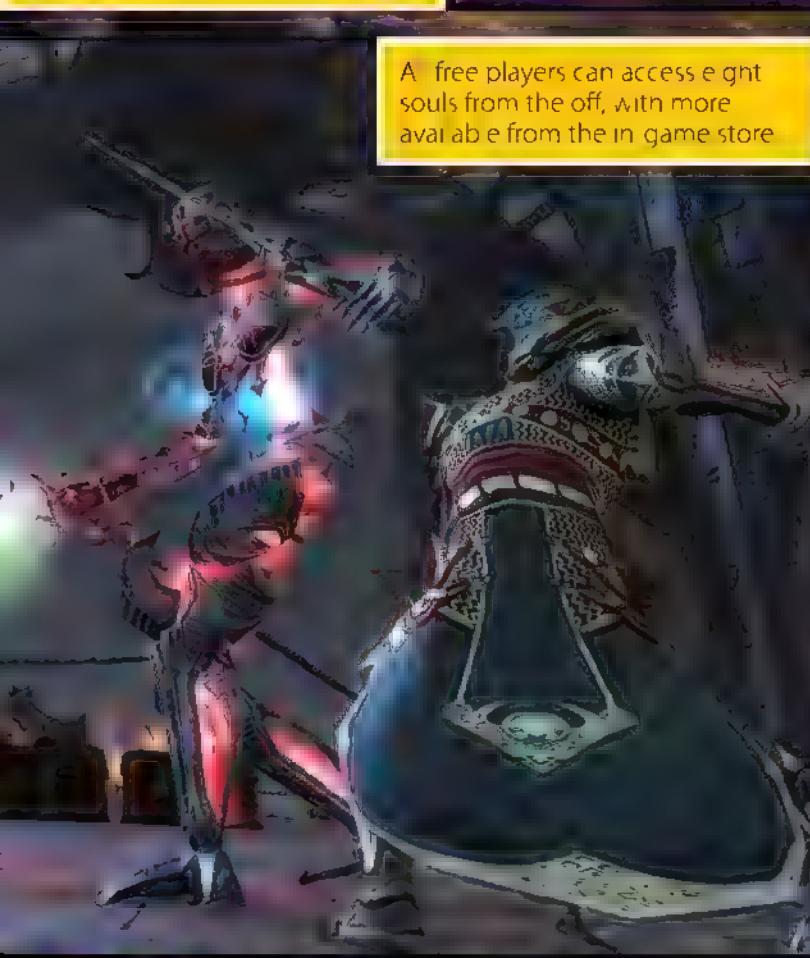
cash. However, the store isn't just about souls, it also offers mounts, customisation items, additional storage etc. Not pay-to-win items by any stretch, just further player choice. At least that's how Simon sees it.

"There's a lot of gamers out there who have a lot of spare cash, that's for sure. That wasn't what we were interested in, though. We wanted to maintain what RIFT has always been and that's a fun place to play with your friends. I'm happy when people pay money in the store because obviously we do need to pay our rent and feed our families, and if we don't make enough on the store we won't be able to create the content we want to make. Happily those playing the game seem to realise that and they want the things we're

INTERVIEW



RIFT's biggest and baddest bosses are making their way into Te era's over world. Newbs beware!



All free players can access eight souls from the off, with more available from the in-game store

offering them so things are looking good.

One area where *RIFT* is potentially lagging behind its competition is its frequency of major content updates. While hot fixes and patches are delivered to the game most weeks, new questing content only comes around every few months, and that's a deliberate move on Trion's part.

"When we first started to do updates, we ended up doing too much too fast, and players became overwhelmed. You've got to be careful, as there is such as thing as too much of a good thing. We're zeroing in on what's working for us, and now what we do is vary the size of the content. The really, really big updates are probably three months apart to be honest, but in-between that we'll have done several medium updates and a whole host of smaller ones."



"So we do updates all the time, but the really big content ones we want to do at a pace where players can focus on it, get to enjoy it and participate in it without getting overwhelmed as there are 19 other things we delivered at the same time."

This argument is in stark contrast

"I love Telera and I love what we made. I just want to continue to add to it"

to the likes of ArenaNet with *Guild Wars 2*, who are staking their game on a rigorous update schedule adding new story content, quest areas and game modes every two weeks. The 'Update Arms Race' may ramp up in the future, but it appears *RIFT* will be

keeping its big guns back for when they're ready for public consumption.

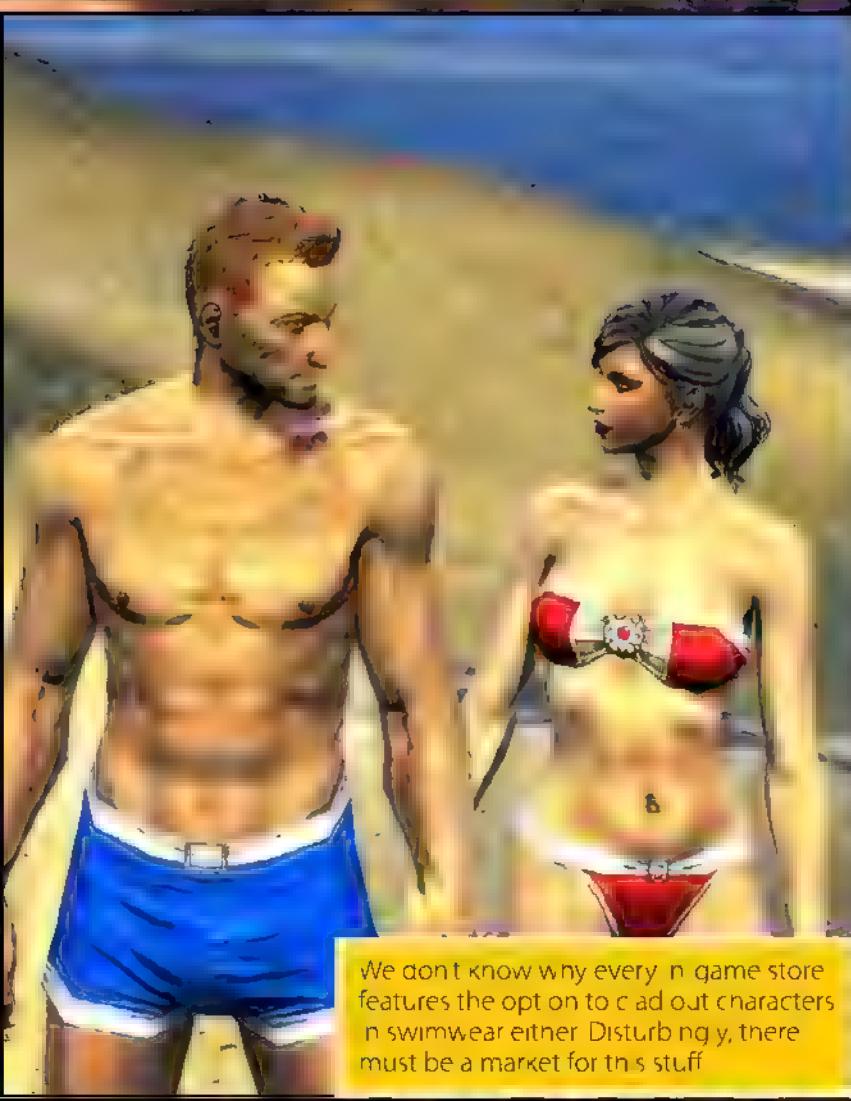
Throughout our discussions with Ffinch there was an assured confidence to his demeanour and unbridled optimism about where his game was heading. This wasn't the end of an era for *RIFT*, it was the start of a new beginning.

"I've been working on *RIFT* for a long time now. It has been out for two-and-a-half years and it took quite a while to make, so I've been working on it for a long time. There's a lot of me in that game, I love the world we've made, I love the lore we've made, the creatures and the type of fantasy which we've put our own spin on. It's been wonderfully successful, which I'm so happy about and proud of. That's the way I look at *RIFT*, this is a place that

INTERVIEW



"Yean we're ascended,
we're not frightened of
those stup a He bugs
We ride them around
like mounts "



We don't know why every in-game store features the option to clad our characters in swimwear either. Disturbingly, there must be a market for this stuff.

love. I love what we made, I just want to continue to add to it."

A lot of developers wax lyrical about their love for a project they work on, but Finch's was genuine. This was clear in the way he discussed his idea to put Defiance's Hellbugs into *RIFT*'s universe on his own suspicion that players would "love it" and how he always challenges Trion's ever-patient lore master Captain Cursor to provide reasoning behind

"Guys, thank you for playing the past 20 years, here's the server code!"

whatever crazy update his team have up their sleeves next.

Like all other MMORPGs before it, however, *RIFT* will at one time head to the big server farm in the sky, like *Star Wars: Galaxies* and *City of Heroes*, before it. For a slight change of pace,

RIFT is starting to show its age a bit, but compared to other free-to-play games it's still rather pretty



we asked Simon about the closure of MMOs, communities being abandoned from the games they love and how he'd like to see *RIFT* retired when the time inevitably comes and he shared with us a rather brilliant idea.

"So this is probably going to get me into all sorts of trouble, but I would hope that when that day comes, as we've talked about many years in the future, I would hope that Trion shows that it's the company that I truly believe it to be and gives *RIFT* as a gift to the community. That would be the way I'd like to see *RIFT* go. It's like,

'Guys thank you for playing for the past 20 years, here's the server code. Run it if you wish.'

Past precedent suggests MMO publishers refrain from the kind of charitable act which Ffinch describes, but the fact that he mentions this solution at all does speak volumes about the kind of optimism *RIFT*'s team has about the future, and how they think Trion Worlds is different from other studios out there.

Time will inevitably tell, but one thing is for sure, *RIFT*'s journey has a long way to go yet. ■

GZ
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The quotes featured in this article are a mere snippet of the full 30-minute interview we conducted with *RIFT*'s Senior Design Director, Simon Ffinch. To hear the entire conversation, click on his well-groomed face.



GZ gamerzines

PREVIEW

THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED

HANDS-ON



PUB: 2K GAMES
DEV: 2K MARIN
LAST GAME:
BIOSHOCK 2
PLATFORMS: PC,
PLAYSTATION 3,
XBOX 360
ETA: 23RD AUGUST

Few terms are scarier to a sci-fi fan than 'reboot' or worse 'prequel', yet 2K Marin find themselves in the unenviable position of their latest release straddling both labels. *The Bureau* isn't a turn-based strategy sandbox like its fellow *XCOM* predecessors, instead it's a story-driven, squad-orientated shooter set in 1950s USA during the height of the Cold War.

Series hallmarks like squad customisation, mission choice and a focus on tactical play remain, only rather than players assuming the role of an all-powerful anonymous commander who orders soldiers around from afar, in *The Bureau* you step onto the battlefield as experienced military spook William

"Hallmarks like squad customisation, mission choice and a focus on tactical play remain"

Carter, as the newest incumbent to the invasion fighting force known as XCOM. Originally this covert outfit was established to fight off Soviet incursions onto USA soil, but after a massive alien invasion takes out seemingly all facets of America's military-industrial complex, only the secret XCOM division stands ➤



A man in a futuristic, metallic suit with glowing green energy fields around his chest and waist is holding a large, ornate sword with a glowing green hilt. He is looking down at it with a serious expression. The background shows a city street at night with blurred lights.

**EXCLUSIVE
SHOTS**

AGENT ROSTER



Begone Doran
ENGINEER

ONLINE

CUSTOMIZE



Any agent's equipment, abilities, perks, name and attire can be customized, but you can't find one with their faces or hair. Well there is a war on after all.

CHANGE FIRST NAME

Change this Agent's first name

Agent

Last Name

Jumpsuit Color

Trim Color

Shirt Color

Tie Color

Back

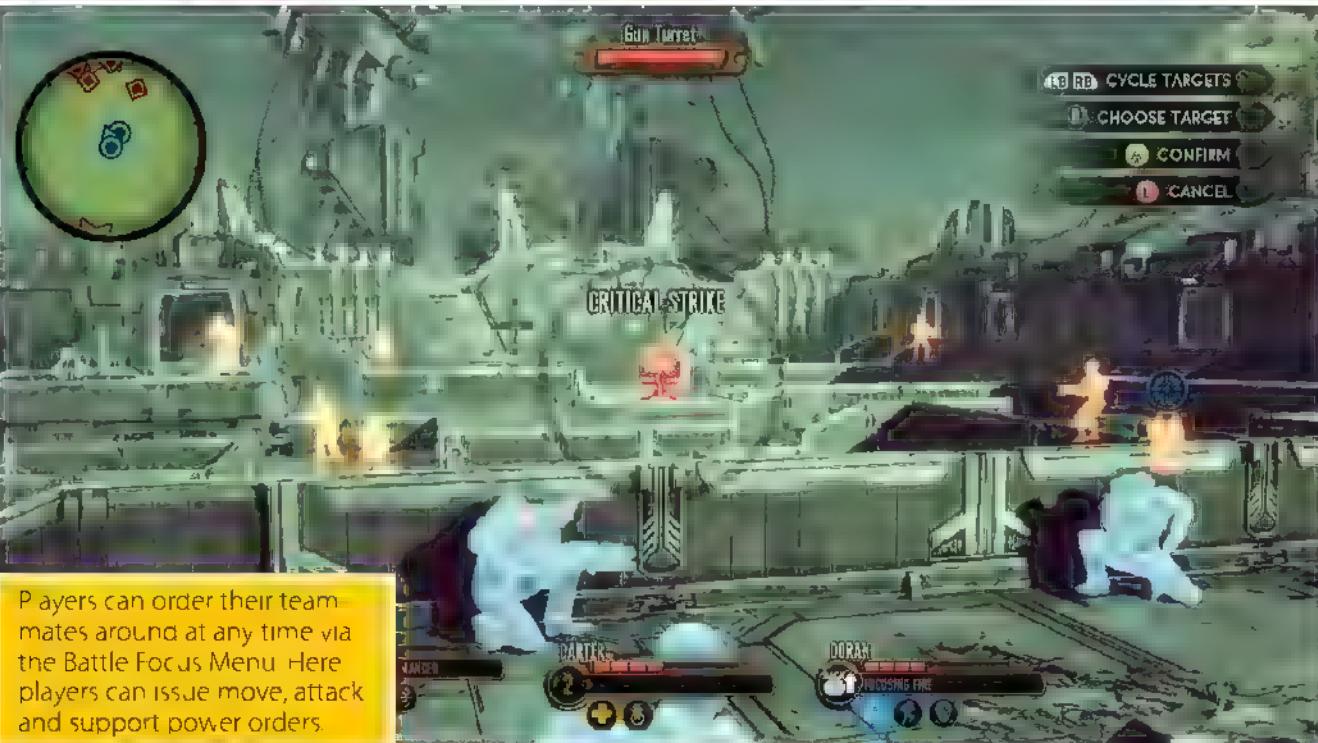
Randomize All

The Skyranger MK

in a position to stop humanity being enslaved by a mysterious yet monstrous extraterrestrial threat.

As premises go, *The Bureau*'s is undoubtedly a strong one, with dialogue and supplemental story material, like audio diaries and text

logs, referencing the mass paranoia of American society and that of its governing figures like Kennedy, Hoover and Eisenhower, at the time. 2K Marin has revelled in offering these classy period touches, but it's the squad-based mission





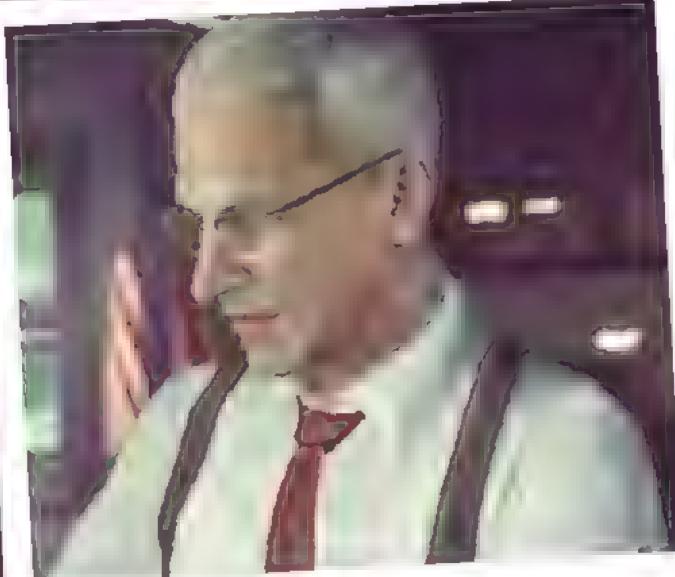
component which is where most of the game's gameplay can be found.

To understand what this release entails, it's probably best to split the game down into its two basic core components: combat and story.

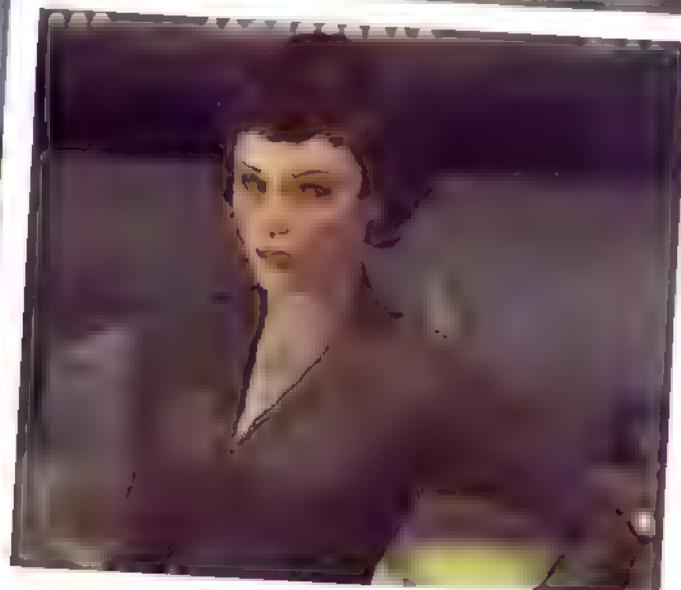
"WELCOME TO EARTH"

Essentially this release boasts the kind of third-person cover-based combat you'd expect, with players able to fire off specific abilities like propelling an enemy into the air with mysterious force, in addition to chucking out grenades or shooting enemies' exposed fleshy parts.

Where *The Bureau* differs slightly is that at all times two squad-mates accompany Carter on the battlefield, and as a high-ranking agent he gets to order them around. Be it selecting specific targets, moving to a particular piece of cover, or firing off abilities. Like chucking out turrets, mines or mysterious blue orbs which cause enemies to suddenly feel the need to disperse. All of the ➤



MYRON FAULK - DIRECTOR OF XCOM.
SECRETIVE, AUTHORITARIAN, PARANOID.
WILLING TO SACRIFICE ANYONE AND
ANYTHING TO SAVE HUMANITY.

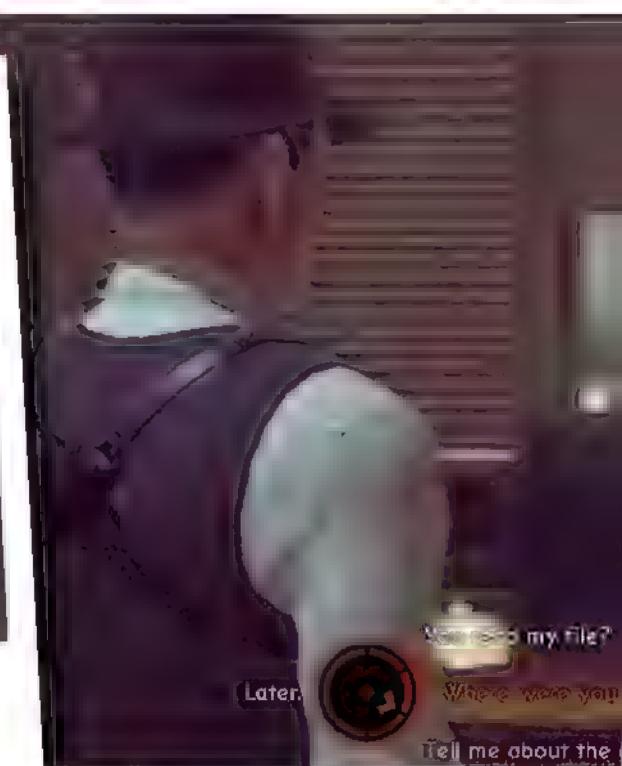


ANGELA WEAVER - COVERT AGENT.
NO-NONSENSE, NARCISSISTIC LONER.
UNSURE WHETHER FAULK'S TRUST IN
CARTER IS WELL-FOUNDED.

PREVIEW



DR HEINRICH DRESNER - SCIENTIST.
INTELLIGENT, NOT BOthered WITH
ETHICS OR HUMAN SACRIFICE.
WANTS TO HARVEST ALIEN TECH.



AGENT KRUT - ANALYST.
COLD AND CALCULATING. WANTS TO
UNDERSTAND THE OVERALL ALIEN
OBJECTIVE BEHIND THE INVASION.

tactical gameplay is driven by the Battle Focus menu which slows time to a crawl, allowing players to determine the best flanking routes in chest-high-wall laden environments, scan any local enemies for potential weaknesses and chuck out powers in quick succession.

Combat feels ripped straight from *Mass Effect* with a few distinctly XCOM touches, like hit percentages to alert players to the possibility of an ally's successful shot, thrown in. The enemy designs do vary the core shooting action a bit, with some enemies like Mutons boasting armour which needs to be shot off in specific areas before they can be taken out, but for the most part this style of gameplay proves very familiar. Not bad by any means, just not particularly novel.

Other XCOM tropes have been taken out of the game as well. For instance there isn't an option to

Dialogue whee's work
exact y as youd expect



disable enemies to harness their technology, instead players can only pick up weapons untied to alien forms in order to use them, while others like permadeath remain. When downed, squad-mates have a brief window to be revived, but when they stop breathing that's it, they're gone completely, along with all their skills and perks. Thankfully new squadmates can be drafted in mid-mission via supply cannisters which allow players to call for reinforcements, but the sense of loss is still surprisingly profound.

We found the second component of *The Bureau*, its story (or more specifically returning to the XCOM HQ hub after missions where most of the plot takes place) much more exciting. After completing the prologue mission, which involves Carter escaping from a military installation swiftly destroyed by the aliens during their opening

AGENT ROSTER

William Carter
SQUAD LEADER

RANK 01

RANK 02

RANK 03

RANK 04

RANK 05

OVERVIEW EQUIPMENT ABILITIES PERKS CUSTOMIZE

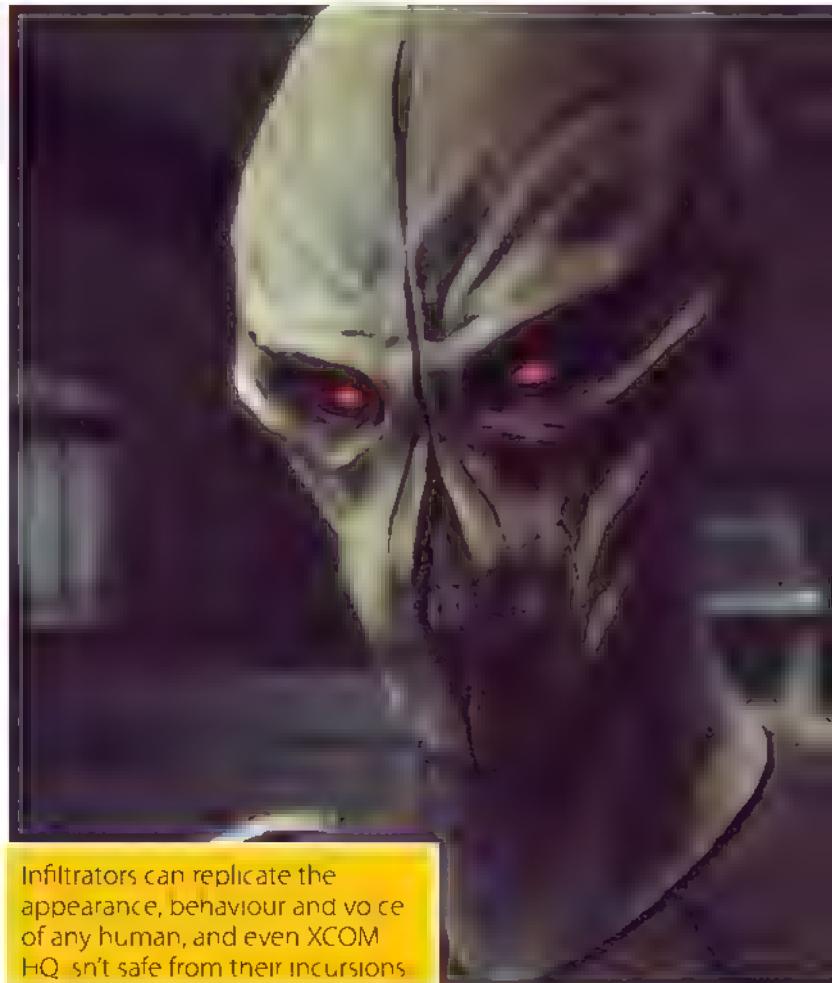
ABILITY: LIFT AVAILABLE

BONUS: Raises a target out of cover.

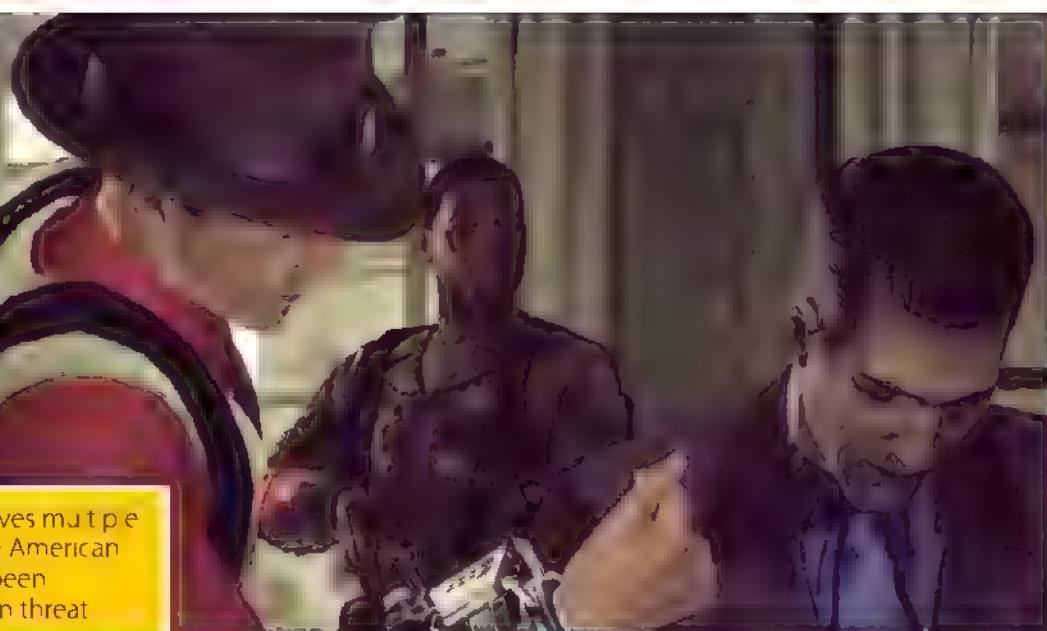
DESCRIPTION: You can now Lift enemies into the air, pulling them out of cover and making them more susceptible to damage.

(A) Purchase

AI skills trees diverge, forcing players to make a choice on what's best to specialise their character in



Infiltrators can replicate the appearance, behaviour and voice of any human, and even XCOM HQ isn't safe from their incursions



The campaign involves multiple excursions to sleepy American towns which have been enslaved by the alien threat

so far, players are slowly introduced to the mechanics of selecting missions, customising soldiers and exploring the XCOM HQ.

Areas of the base unlock as players continue through the story, which creates a tangible feeling that the XCOM movement is gaining momentum in the war, or at least they're growing as an enterprise.

The base consists of Engineering, a firing range, Skyranger Bay, Infirmary, Laboratory, Operations and Ready Room, and it's a thrill to explore. Here is also where players

get to engage with *The Bureau's* cast of deep characters – be it scientists, field agents, radio operators or whatever.

2K Marin has characterised these hard-working souls brilliantly with some truly excellent moral quandaries posed to the player, such as Director Faulk slowly descending into paranoia-driven madness as the threat to humanity weighs on his shoulders, or Angela Weaver wanting to murder a captured shapeshifting Infiltrator, even though the being may offer valuable info on what the aliens actually want.

2K Marin has personalised XCOM's alien invasion premise in a way that's series has never seen before, and the personal struggles here are just as emotional and brutal as any other shooter RPG out there. Staff on the base will even try and tempt you to take specific missions on, outlining a particular strategic advantage, technological gain or moral reasoning. It's these story-driven moments where *The Bureau* excels and it's why it's required gaming for

In the Battle Focus mode, percentages give an indication of whether an ally is in a good position to take a shot.

MISSION SELECTION

(B) Previous Report

Now

Next Report

(B) Next Report

RUMBLERS OF TERROR

Novato, California

We are receiving reports of devastating earthquakes in the San Francisco area. The damage to infrastructure and resulting fires in the major naval port has cost 82 lives and damaged one of our battleships, the USS North Carolina. Our analysts theorize that the seismic activity may be the result of more sinister "terraforming" along the San Andreas faultline.

Missions are split between critical story content and optional side quests

(B) Back

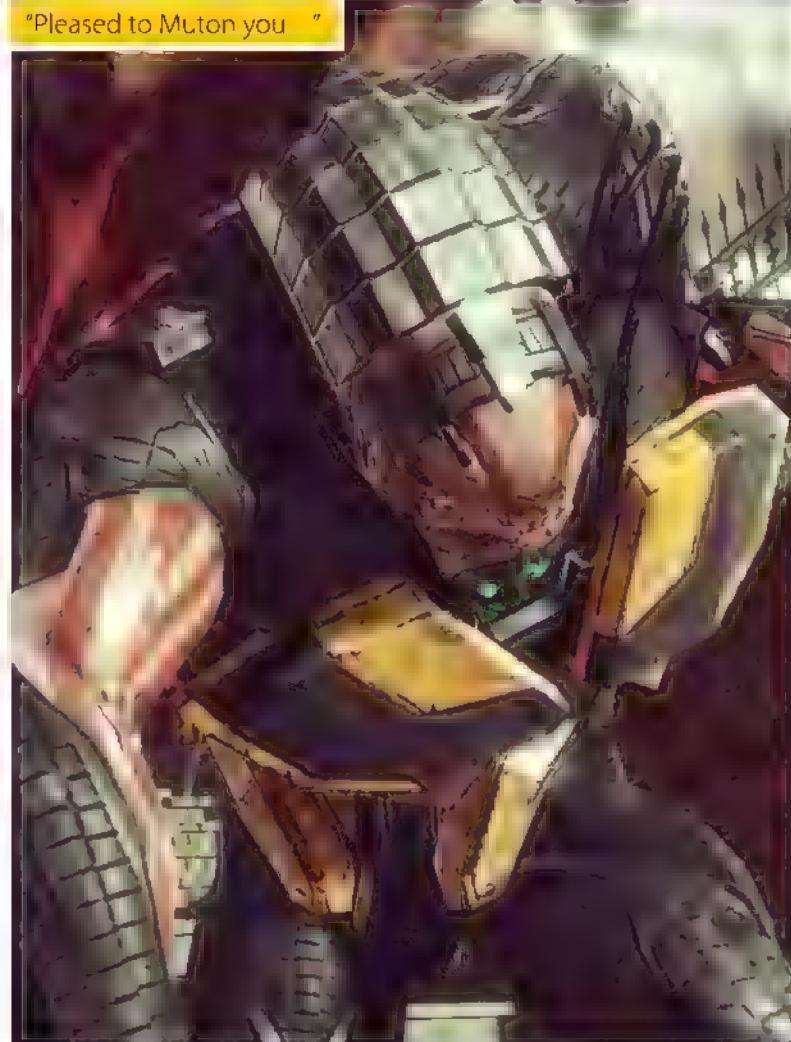
anyone who has played any title in the *XCOM* series before. 2K Marin is fleshing out this universe in some really exciting ways, exploring the motivations behind why an alien race would invade our planet and the cost human protectors pay to fight off the threat.

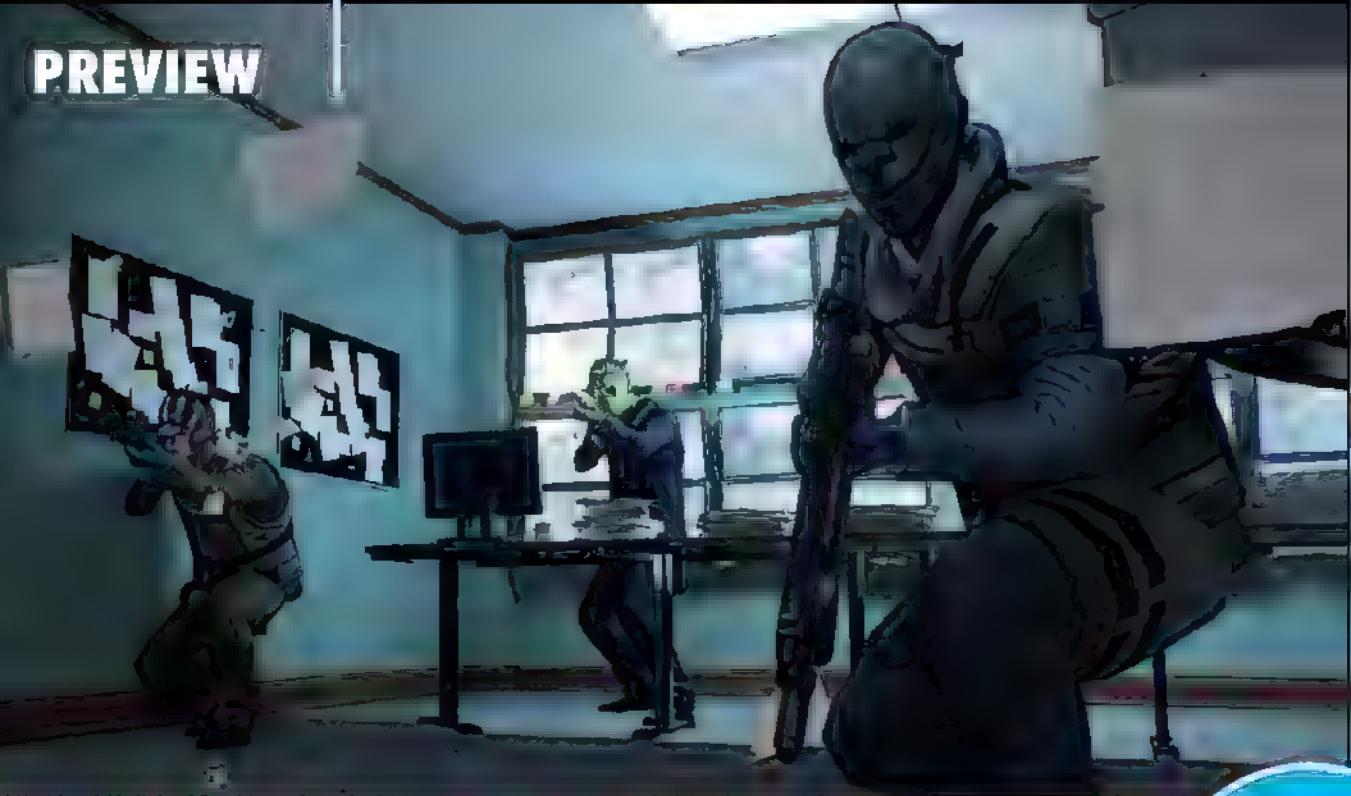
The Bureau's combat mechanics and shooter gameplay may be well worn, but the game's premise, attention to period detail and consistently brilliant dialogue and character design means that it's an experience that most definitely stands out. Yes it's a prequel, and yes it reboots the *XCOM* series in some very fundamental ways, but that doesn't mean its narrative journey isn't any less tense, unpredictable or exhilarating to be a part of. ■

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**EXCLUS
SHOW**

PAYDAY

HEISTING WITH FRIENDS



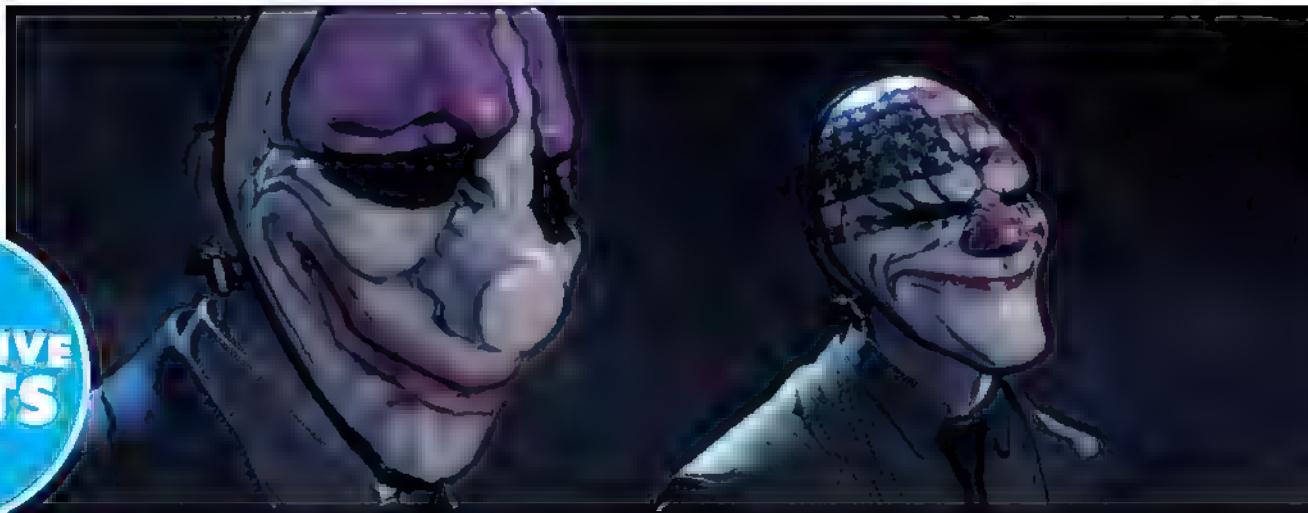
PC DVD
18+
OVERKILL SOFTWARE
PUB DEV
LAST GAME
PLATFORM
ETA

It isn't success which defines memorable moments in co-op, it's actually near failure. Think about it. That time in *Left 4 Dead* when you were moments away from jumping into the evac chopper atop Mercy Hospital, only for a rampaging tank to swipe your team-mates onto the ground below, or that big boss mech fight in *Borderlands 2* when you managed to revive yourself moments from wiping yourself completely out thanks to the boss spawning easy fodder into the world, thus allowing your buddies to get back into the fight via an easy kill.

It's these snatching victory from the jaws of defeat moments which make the effort of getting your mates together on one server completely worthwhile,

"Overkill Software is expanding Payday's core heist-'em-up gameplay in every conceivable way"

as not only is your group sharing these experiences but they're also sharing the panic, heartache and threat of all-out failure that these



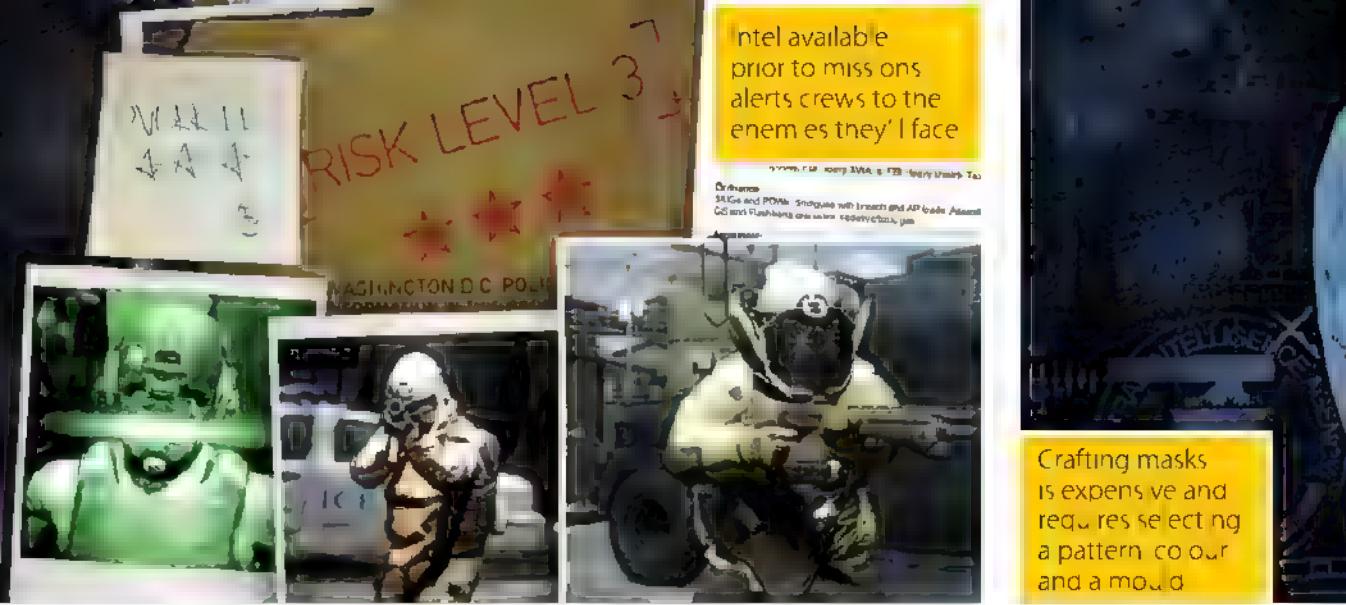
back to the wall moments provide. *Payday: The Heist* had these moments every few minutes, with as many as four players taking part in bank robberies, slaughterhouse heists and other missions that definitely wouldn't look out of place in Michael Mann's cinematic opus, *Heat*.

For the sequel, Overkill Software is expanding *Payday*'s core heist-'em-up gameplay in every conceivable way. The shooting feels tighter, AI routines are smarter offering up more believable enemy clusters, and mission design feels much more reactive and varied thanks to the new

procedurally generated mission system, known as Crime.Net.

Once you enter this unique mission hub, with both offline and online matchmaking options available, you'll see lots of different jobs slowly pinging up on the map screen, all with varying difficulty levels. Some will involve single-day events like robbing a bank for a quick pay off, whereas others will involve a series of missions framed around stealing commodities, marshalling the handover to a fellow criminal gang, getting paid and then going on your way.

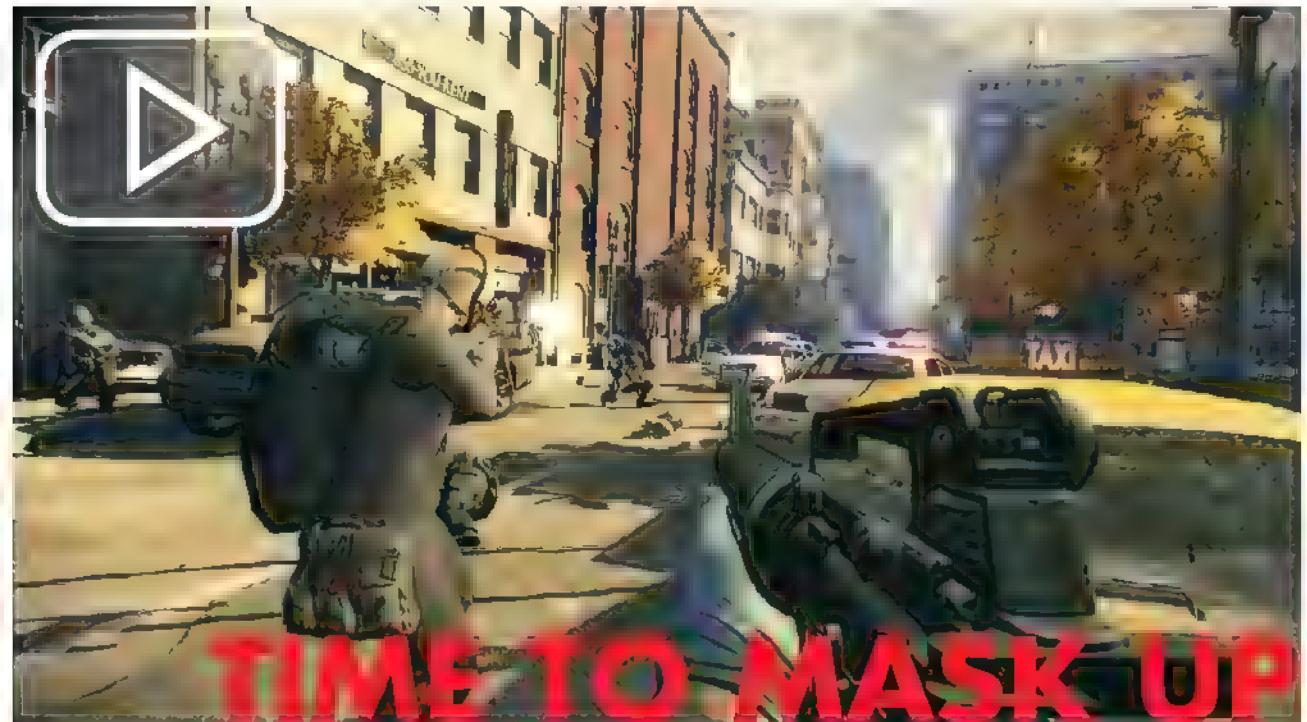
Any mission, regardless of length, is preceded by a snort ➤



voiced blurb, concerning the character hiring your crew and what their motivations are behind your objective. Again, this can be as simple as a mob boss earning enough scratch to keep his lady friend in the life she's accustomed to versus stealing priceless art from a prominent museum, so that the illegally-gotten pieces can be

placed inside a Senator's house to frame him. These little story vignettes have a surprisingly big impact, but they're only a small part of this well put together system. The other parts involve the make-up of the missions themselves.

Jobs can have as many as seven separate mission components and as few as





INTERVIEW

DAVID POLKOWSKI

GAME DIRECTOR

Overkill Software has expanded *Payday*'s core mechanics substantially for the sequel, particularly with the procedurally generated missions via Crime.Net. How many missions would you say are now in the game over the original?

I think it's eight times more content than the original *Payday*. We were anticipating that this game was going to be downloadable, but then it clocked in at 12-13 Gbs, so we wildly passed any conceivable, sensible amount of content we would have added before.

At what point in *Payday 2*'s development did the project shift from making a downloadable title, to making a full boxed release?

We were always making a full game and then we were just like, "Uh-oh, I guess it really is a full game." But it didn't change how we were working.

Overkill Software are based in Stockholm, Sweden which has a thriving development scene with the likes of DICE, Arrowhead, Avalanche Studios and Fatshark all calling the capital home. Do you think Sweden rivals Britain in terms of game output?

I actually think that Stockholm is the number one game development centre in Europe. There is so much talent in Stockholm, as there's Mojang, DICE, us, Avalanche... It's insane how many gaming places there are and I'm not even naming all of them. There are also guys in Malmö who are working on *The Division* for Ubisoft, so there's a huge awesome scene now. And you've also got Rovio, too!

Why do you think that's happened? A lot of those companies have sprung up over the past dozen years or so.

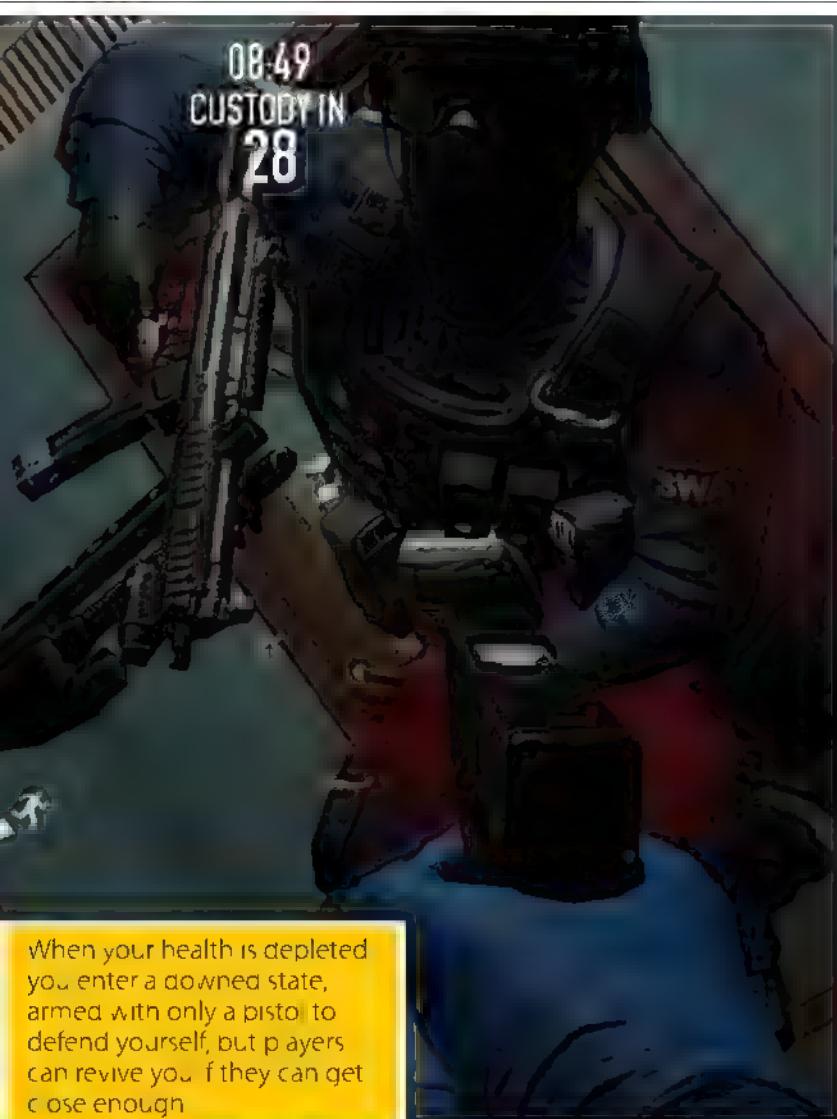
Stockholm is a great place to live, and I think there is a huge coder/designer culture in Sweden. There are dark, dark winters, much like those in Finland, and they just breed game developers.

There's also a hard edge to many of the games that come out of that part of Europe as well, like *Hotline Miami* and your game as well. In *Payday 2* players don't have to be embroiled in battle with the police every mission, as now there's the option to achieve objectives stealthily with no alarms being triggered. Do you anticipate many

one, with more activities thrown in if say a player gets captured by police, lots of people have been shot and killed, or if the randomised mission engine decides to throw a new activity in for the hell of it. This system is very much like *Left 4 Dead*'s silent yet sadistic AI Director, only rather than just overlooking gameplay inside missions, it also organises things outside of them. This randomised component also alters map structure and guard patterns as well.

All in all, there are 26 mission templates the game actively switches between in response to any job being offered. That's a staggering number of potential missions, which makes the original game's nine heist missions look rather pathetic.

Before missions there's also the option to buy intel on locations to help your criminal activities go a little easier, such as finding out the location of an alarm box, a code to a safe or buying off security personnel so they leave ➤



an entry point unlocked. All these aids cost money, but they raise your chances of success.

SHOOTING TO SUCCESS

Despite all of these changes, some *Payday* tropes remain the same, such as making sure drills don't jam during missions and carefully ferrying duffle-bagged loot to escape vehicles to complete missions.

AI tactics still revolve around enemy numbers rather than genuine tactics, with officers usually camping out entry points and exit points once the alarm has been raised. Wave-like assaults still occur regularly once the proverbial hits the fan, and special classes of police such as shield bearers and taser squads can still mess teams up in a matter of moments if they aren't careful. Also, like in the previous game, missions aren't initiated until characters 'mask up,' which allows a brief window for crews to survey the scene the game has

Jobs in the CrimeNet map spring up every few moments showing both difficulty and the number of players in any given server. It's a brilliantly disguised matchmaking tool, which maintains the heist atmosphere amazingly well.



presented to them.

Where things majorly differ now is that there's a stealth component to gameplay, meaning it is possible to complete missions without alerting the authorities to your activities. This inevitably involves taking out cameras, using silencers and staying in the shadows. Make no mistake, this approach is even trickier than you imagine, and requires four players to work perfectly in tandem.

Unsurprisingly, our merry squad, consisting of other games journalists, couldn't manage the stealth approach when we went hands-on. One particular heist went wrong simply because one luckless soul moved too close to a hand dryer in a bathroom which set off a telltale hum, and in turn prompted investigation from a nearby guard, who found all four of us lurking menacingly in nearby cubicles. That said, we didn't lose much from our failed stealth attempt,

players will adopt that challenging yet rewarding approach?

I think some people will try and I think they will fail. Then they'll either put together a crew which is capable of pulling off a stealth playthrough or they'll run with their existing crew and be completely fine. That's by design though, as we know stealth is really, really hard and that's the way we wanted it. If we made it easy then the game would be broken.

You should look up the bank stealth playthrough on YouTube because we let some people try early builds, and the guy behind the video said it took him 80 to 90 hours with other people to try out all the permutations because the game is dynamic. So they couldn't even say they were going to try it a certain way and execute the plan, as it hardly ever played out that way. This one time they do it, and I swear to god, it's just like watching a movie; they get people on the ground, they take out dudes in the security room, they control civilians - it's super cool!

One thing that surprised us was just how reactive the environments were. One particular moment saw us ruining a playthrough for our team because we accidentally triggered a hand-dryer which alerted a nearby guard. Do you think there's ever a danger of making a multiplayer shooter too difficult, as you don't want to make it so hardcore that it alienates the majority of gamers out there?

The level designers are really good at managing how many elements players have to deal with at any one time. In the bank you can board up the windows, in the art house mission you can use the hand-dryer to pull the guard into the bathroom and take him out. There's always a couple of little things, usually no more than a few, that give you some degree of latitude or options. Really, the level designers are carrying the weight of the game on their shoulders, but that isn't to dismiss what everybody else does. I still don't know how we made the game, it's such a blur.

There isn't a core narrative in *Payday 2*, but missions do have more story elements this time around. Mainly this is delivered in the pre-mission screen through mission contact bios and blurbs describing the activities and an overall aim – turning these mission activities into almost like mini-stories or vignettes. Why did you decide to go for that approach?

Well, it's a co-operative game which can be played out of order, so it doesn't make sense to have a linear narrative when you can drop into anyone's





CONTRACT: WATCHDOG

Hector needs watchdogs for transporting cocaine.

- Guard the cocaine in the truck.
- Adapt to new situations.
- Reach the harbor.
- Deliver the shipment to boat driver.

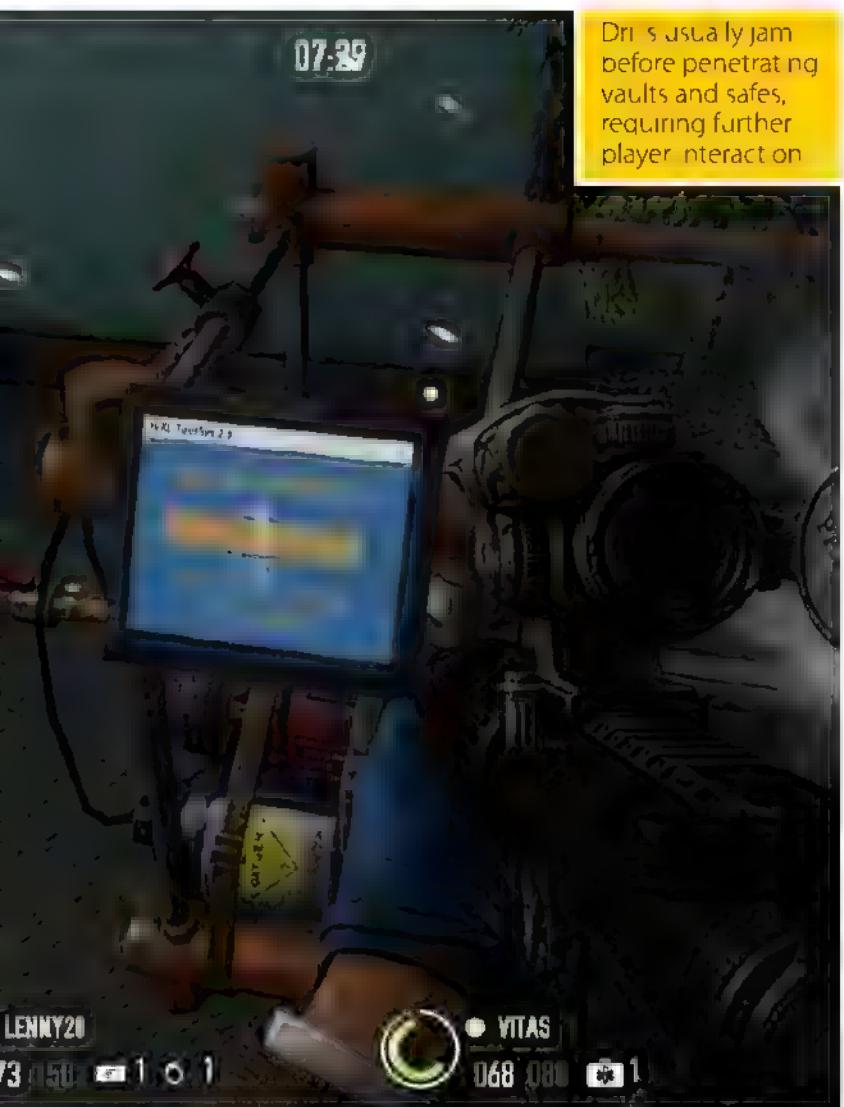
RISK: ★★★★

DIFFICULTY: NORMAL. NO RISK REWARD.

POTENTIAL REWARDS:

PAY GRADE	★★★★★
EXPERIENCE	2,919 + 0 POTENTIAL LEVEL UP
DAY RATE	2 x \$107,000 + 2 x \$0
CONTRACT PAY	\$42,000 + \$0

PAYOUT: \$199,161



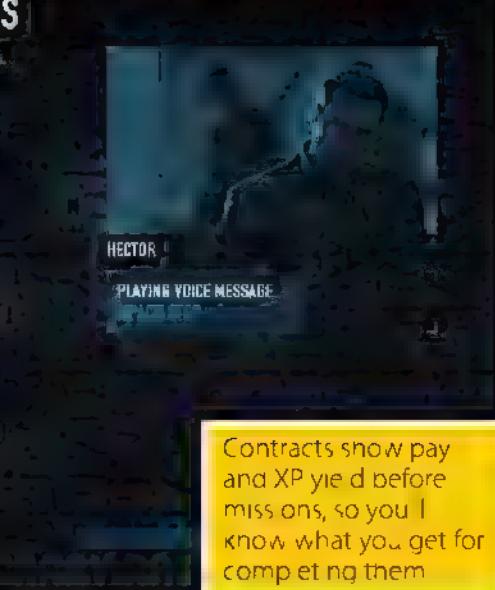
as we subsequently shot the enthusiastic guard and carried on, albeit with alarms blazing and police invading.

The guns in *Payday 2* are also worthy of a mention. These tools of death are usually much of a muchness in games, but *Payday 2*'s possess an astonishing level of detail. Players will spot 'Property of US Government' on the side of

"Sequels naturally iterate on their predecessors, but Payday 2 does so much more than that"

weapons, fire ratio toggles above triggers, and other neat little touches other games ignore.

Overkill know their guns, and they've gone to excruciating detail to ensure their weapons look as convincing as possible, and this commitment remains no matter how many sleek mods you



Contracts show pay and XP yield before missions, so you know what you get for completing them

apply.

All weapon mods can be bought for money earned during missions, but more valuable items are restricted to post-mission loot drops, via a randomised card-hoard mechanic. At the end of a successful mission, all players are given a hand of five mystery cards, of which they can choose only one. This is a minor reward system, but it should have a big impact in motivating people to stick around until missions are completed.

Sequels naturally iterate on their predecessors, but *Payday 2* does so much than that. This sequel alters this series' core formula so much that it would be very easy to see the original game as a simple proof of concept for its substantially expanded successor. Overkill Software has added real player choice and genuine replayability to their heist sim which should ensure it stays on players hard drives long into their crime-filled future. ■

experience. Also having a segmented structure means that we can allow jobs to be any length – they can be 10 days if we want them to be. We can switch environments between them and we can do stuff like dynamically interrupt them with escape segments. We can have one huge job that is an hour like in the original *Payday*, or we could do five jobs mixed between a jewellery store, bank heist, etc.

Do you feel as though there's a sweet spot with regards to co-op games and how long a map playthrough should be?

I don't want to play the same thing for an hour – that is my feedback whenever I experience co-op. That isn't to say there aren't spots where longer sessions could be cool, but to me 10-15 minutes is a great number. You can push that to 30 minutes, but you need to keep switching to keep people playing again and again. If it's an hour, maybe people can't commit to a single playthrough for that long.

You're essentially sidestepping the whole *Left 4 Dead* problem with people not being able to commit to an entire episode then. We hope so.

Is there a training mode in *Payday 2* to help new players?

That's what the Safehouse is for. You can go in there, experiment with all the components like picking up money, meeting objectives etc. You get to see how things work in an environment where people aren't shooting you in the face. That's pretty much it, the rest of the game is pretty much good luck, go figure it out! Hopefully you'll have friends who will play with you, and that's the one thing we are trying to encourage right now. You know, play with your friends, have a great time, evangelise it to others, and get them to play with their friends. Then meet some randoms and play with them.

That's kind of the tricky problem, as you don't want your game's community to become so toxic that it intimidates others from getting involved.

That's a risk, but we're trying to incentivise people to play together, even in the mechanics of the game, as you need to finish jobs to get stuff. And in order to do that you need to work together.

End of mission loot cards help massively in that regard as well.

I think so, because everybody wants to get to that moment. Hopefully it will all work out.

For a detailed review of *Payday 2*, check out GamerZines.com

PREVIEW

Zara
2443

Pisa

2,700

P

Naples

2,700

RISE OF VENICE

EXCLU
SHO

HAND-ON



For the family...

There's a distinct Mafioso vibe to Gaming Minds' latest historical trading sim. You wouldn't think so by looking at it, but the music, the wanton corruption of city state officials and relentless need to please Venice's richest families (the so-called Council of Ten) just leads to an unmistakable Tony Soprano vibe.

It's strange and rather distracting frankly, but it appears the German developer has learned a lot of lessons from the distinctly disappointing *Port Royale 3* to put together a substantially improved trading sim. The emphasis hasn't changed from the previous

game, with players starting out in charge of one solitary vessel and progressing to multiple fleets over time, by rinsing and repeating the same profit-inducing formula again and again. Buy a boatload of a valuable resource from one city, sail to wherever that commodity's rarest, sell the stock and recoup a tidy profit. This is business 101 in its purest form, with prices rising and falling in accordance with disease, war and famine, imitating production in any of the campaign map's Mediterranean cities.

The 15th-Century time-frame does offer up additional layers of



complexity however, with players having to obtain a license from any settlement before trading by increasing their trader rank, which

"This is business 101 in its purest form, with commodity prices rising and falling"

involves raising enough revenue to level up and complete missions for the Venice council to win favour with particular delegates, so that they can

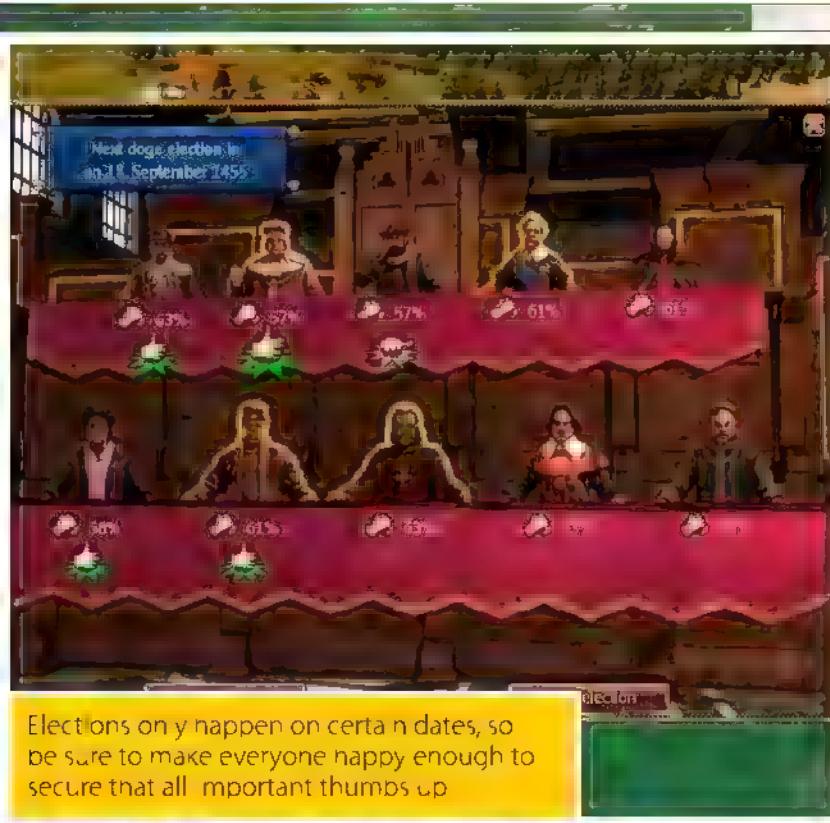
raise your status across the continent. Of course you could bypass that in true Mafia fashion and just bribe a city's dock official, but that's a bit too costly to do all the time.

The good news is that Gaming Minds has finally gotten rid of the compartmentalised interface/game engine which bloated *Port Royale 3* with needless load times. Now there's no need to load into a city before trading with them. Instead, all trading now takes place via a unified overworld with players able to zoom in and out to surprisingly diverse extremes. This single change >

then



Visually, *Rise of Venice* is rather basic, but all the important simulation mechanics are here.



makes the simple act of trading much quicker and more enjoyable, and the commodity interface is also much easier to understand with colour-coded bars indicating when a city has a particular commodity, be it pottery, grain or whatever, in high quantity.

The story-based campaign introduces the core components of trading, ship battles and political wrangling between different members of Venice's council rather well. The addition of a new family mechanic means that siblings, partners and in-laws can also be used to perform mundane tasks on your behalf in addition to heading one of your fleets.

The early parts of the campaign we sampled didn't possess much of



At a quick glance it's possible to ascertain potential revenue opportunities at any settlement

what we would call a plot, but this tumultuous period in history is rife with political backstabbing, religious posturing and warmongering, so the stage is set for Gaming Minds to do something exciting.

"This tumultuous period in history is rife with political backstabbing"

Boasting only 25 cities to trade with may cause trading veterans to dismiss this as a more casual sim, but that focus makes the game's initial difficulty curve much easier to grasp from the off. Traveling from the tip of Africa to Athens and into the Black Sea

takes a matter of days and the x5 button is always on hand to quicken a route's travel time.

Bolstering the single-player campaign, there's also a four-player co-op/competitive online mode, a ladderboard-driven scenario mode and a sandbox mode, so there's plenty of ways to play.

The stage is set nicely for Gaming Minds to win back some of the reputation they lost with *Port Royale 3*, and from what we played, this new enterprise is shaping up rather well. There's absolutely no doubt this is still very much a traditional trading experience, but for purists of the genre that really won't be a bad thing at all. ■



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PREVIEW

The Raven: Legacy of a Master Thief

HANDS-ON PREVIEW



WIP

PUB: NORDIC GAMES

PUBLISHING

DEV: KING ART

LAST GAME: THE BOOK OF UNWRITTEN TALES

PLATFORM: PC

ETA



TWITTER

@KingArtGames
Orchestra soundtrack and blogpost by our composer Benny Oschmann at <http://blog.kingartgames.com>

@LastKnownMod
Bought The Raven: Legacy of a master thief, lets see if this game is good and maybe I will review it

@gaminggoodness
Just played The Raven: Legacy of a Master Thief. It's slow but kind of charming, just like its forty-something mustached protagonist!

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

Stuffy, yet, not without charm

Every few months, no matter how padded out the release cycle is with so-called 'blockbusters', we can't help but have a craving to get properly stuck into an old-school adventure game. KING Art are usually at hand to offer exactly that, but their last release *The Book of Unwritten Tales*, proved a bit too weird and fantasy filled for our tastes.

Thankfully, this year the German developer is putting out something more grounded. Yes it's another point-and-click adventure, but this time the pace has slowed and the premise is set in a romanticised version of 1960s Europe, with players controlling balding, over-the-hill Swiss police constable, Anton Jakob Zellner. Now game protagonists are rarely as pudgy as this gentleman, let alone Swiss, but then this episodic adventure isn't like any other game out there. The plot centres around tracking down a legendary jewel thief known only as the Raven and the dialogue, set-pieces and puzzle designs are all created to be extremely family-friendly.

Despite the opening act featuring explosions, fire and alcohol manipulation, the pace is still rather sedate. Much other elderly investigators, we're thinking Miss Marple or Poirot, Zellner is constantly proving his worth to younger whipper-snappers who usually just write him off as a useless PC plod. The big budget soundtrack

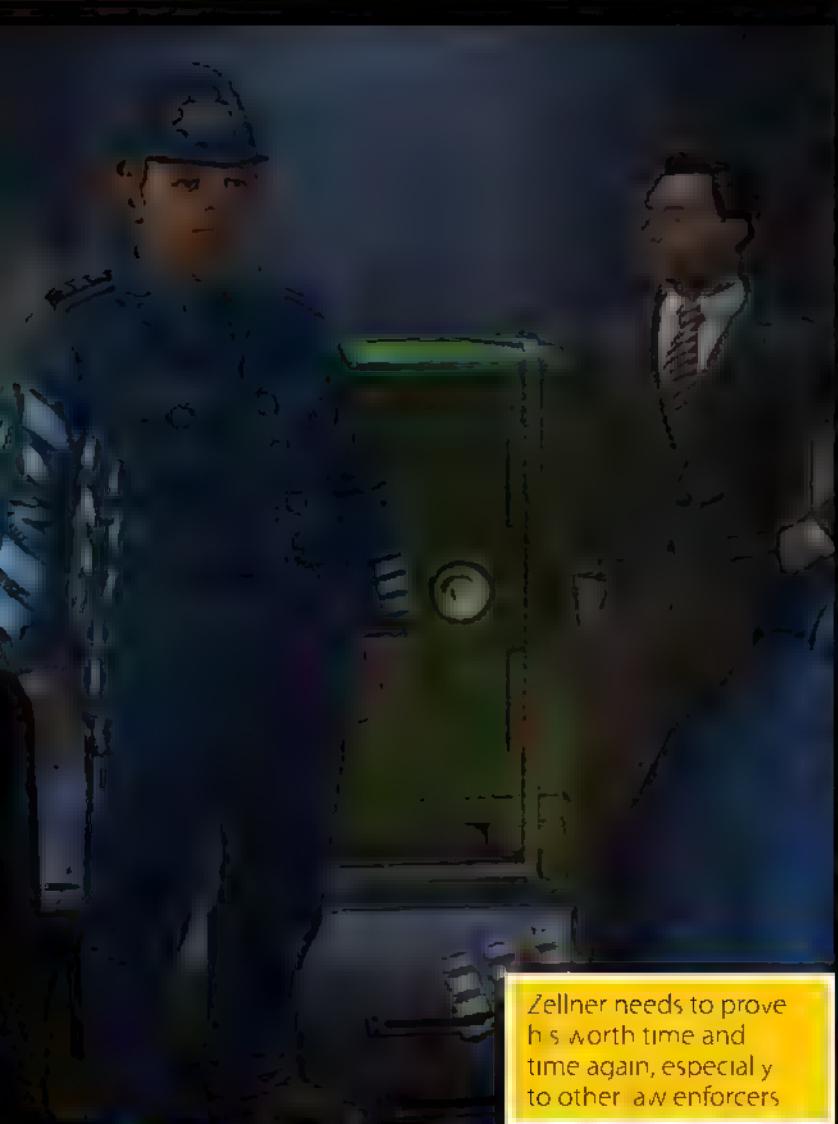


"Game protagonists are rarely as pudgy as this gentlemen, let along Swiss, but then this episodic adventure is unlike any other game out there"

PREVIEW

Return of the Devil?
Inspector Zellner - Agent
Legend's Trap
Professor Edge's Curse
The Kicked On Mystery
Business as usual
Early Christmas in Plymouth
Merry Mather and Matt Mather
Catastrophe in the Cellar

Every character and plot development is noted in Zellner's pocket book



helps with this Sunday evening mystery vibe too, adding a light and breezy atmosphere to proceedings which never get too heavy or sinister.

Mystery hangs thick in the air of the first episode, which clocks in around seven hours, as Zellner tries to protect a priceless gem from being pilfered, but it's the quality of the dialogue and the straightforward nature of the puzzles which will keep you playing. Sure, the animations are a bit stiff, some of the character models look they're made out of plasticine, but strangely this just adds to the game's charm.

The puzzle design is strictly framed around item harvesting and combination, with characters ever ready to tell you their life story in a completely unguarded manner, but they also drop heavy hints about what to do if you become stuck.

There's also a surprisingly innovative in-game economy associated with hints as well. Whenever you complete a story

Zellner needs to prove his worth time and time again, especially to other law enforcers



Environments are consistently gorgeous, it's just a shame that the standard of character mode isn't quite as high

objective you earn points, which can be used to show all the interactive items in any given scene. The points are plentiful so you won't run out, but every hint costs means it's very easy to remain stubborn during more difficult challenges.

The Raven will undoubtedly be too sedate for some gamers' tastes, even those who have a passion for adventure games, but if you're looking for a relaxing story with plenty of twists and turns along with a palpable feeling of majesty then this experience is perfect.

KING Art has made a good start to their new adventure series. Here's hoping the next two episodes are just as charming and delightful. ■



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gamerzines



JEREMY GAFFNEY UNDERSTANDING MMOs

PUB: NCsoft
DEV: CARBINE STUDIOS
ETA: END OF 2013

BIO



Jeremy Gaffney has been making MMOs since 1994. He was Lead Designer on *Tabula Rasa*, *Asheron's Call*, and managed a host of NCsoft titles before joining Carbine Studios.

Carbine Studios' Executive Producer explains

We've met a number of MMO developers over the years, but we don't think any have been as forthright with their opinions as Jeremy Gaffney. And we mean that in a good way, honest.

The co-founder of Turbine, now with Carbine Studios, has helped produce some of our favourite ever MMOs including *City of Heroes*, *Asheron's Call*, and even the criminally misunderstood *Tabula Rasa*, so it was perhaps unavoidable that our questioning would veer away from his next project *Wildstar*.

to cover the wider problems affecting the MMO genre. Gaffney provided numerous insights into problems of retention, monetisation, the pressure of regular updates and other issues which occupied our thoughts long after we'd put the phone down. Here's how our discussion panned out...

MMOs are unique in the games industry because they are defined by their payment model more than anything else. Is that frustrating for you, as you know you'll turn great sways of your



S WITH WILDSTAR

INTERVIEW

the design ethos behind the Sci fi MMORPG

potential audience away from your game by simply uttering the terms 'subscription', 'free-to-play' and 'in-game item store'?

You can't rail against the universe, you can only do your best to work within it. People are jaded with a lot of models because they've been screwed a lot of times before, so our number one goal was to make sure we're not screwing people. Make sure we have something that doesn't feel like you're being gouged every step of the way and provide good value.

I don't really know if there's a game out there that lives or dies based

purely on its business model. You could make a good argument for *League of Legends*, because they do a great job with its three-week updates which ward off retention – 'Ah a cool new thing came out, oh I'm gonna try it, I'm going to keep playing for three weeks. Maybe I'm getting bored... oh wait, another cool thing!'

My argument is that good games sell and they make money over time. I'm not sure if *Star Wars: The Old Republic* would have launched free-to-play they would have had more profit. I don't know if the subscription model hurt them or not, or if



INTERVIEW



The Mechanari has to be the coolest race in all MMO-dom, if only for the sleek armour



In this business you learn by smacking your face into the wall and then trying something new

the [free-to-play] conversion will rebound their performance. I don't have a crystal ball, but my suspicion is if you make a good game where it's fun to level to cap and you make sure there's unique stuff to do at cap you'll do alright. Games that haven't followed that formula have failed consistently. I may be a bearer of a very simple brain, but it seems to me that developers need to work on delivering those two things.

Wildstar comes from a very experienced dev team who has worked on a multitude of different projects. Is it a challenge to communicate all of Wildstar's different components to players?

In this business you learn by smacking your face into the wall and then trying something new. Over time we've all smacked our



faces into a fair number of walls and we all have a good map of what works well and what doesn't, but it's tricky because one of things we really want to do is offer a well-polished MMO experience and we have our own unique take on how to offer that.

It's tough to summarise. We have about 20 different systems that are new. I don't know if anyone has done Discoveries before with random pieces of the world which drop in and out, or War Plots or housing in the depth that we're doing it, or the dynamic raiding... We don't have one single unique selling point to offer to people, we have like 40 things that are cool. Paths just happen to be the less-unique one you bump into at low levels.

There's a war sometimes between having something you can market well in one sentence versus something that's truly compelling. That's the balance

for us. We would rather have the path elements as part of a complete nutritious breakfast, as opposed to trying to fool everyone into thinking that War Plots are everything. If you're a hardcore PvP'er who wants to take a town, capture raid bosses and then fly around and destroy everything then that's for you, but that's not every player necessarily. So it's the goal of doing a lot of things right versus being able to communicate them well and efficiently without being a bullshit artist about it. Conversely, it's also about not being so many different things that you water down the experience for everyone. That's the challenge that faces every developer and it's one that we tackle head-on, but at the end of the day we want to make a good game. People love the Beta, they are having a strong time. Retention is much more important than marketing because that's where the money is.



INTERVIEW

Wildstar is one of the more lighthearted MMOs out there, with a plot which emphasises humour over drama

Carbine Studios has been refreshingly frank about how *Wildstar* is being designed and the reasoning behind it. That's quite novel for an MMO developer, but why are other studios so secretive?

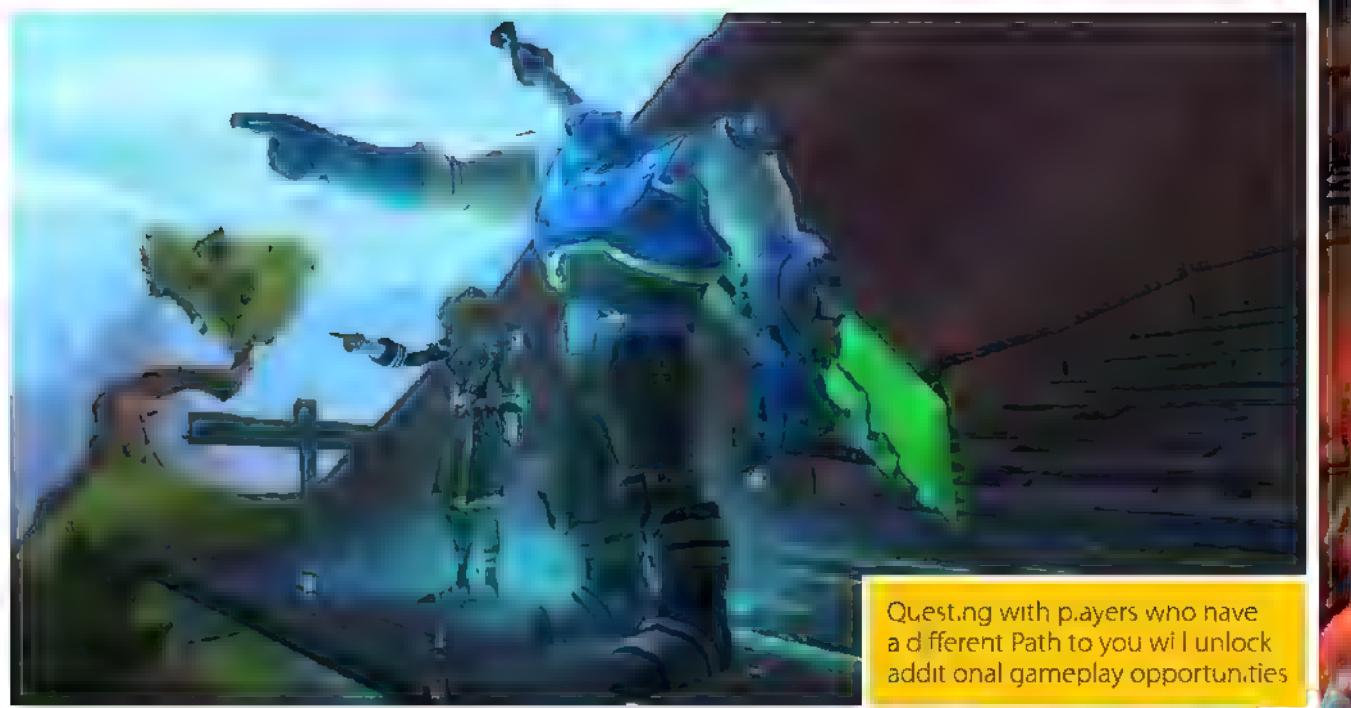
There's a reason why the MMO-making community is so quiet. I'll make a bit of a broad statement, but a lot of the industry is run by people who have worked on *Ultima Online*, *Everquest*, *Asheron's Call*... those early games. Working on those games and learning in real-time was like wearing a shock collar and whenever you did something stupid the community would push a button and bzzzrt! Guess what? A couple of million users playing your game are generally smarter than you, because on aggregate they are going to figure out every mistake you make and shock you. Some of those shocks meant that people learned not to promise stuff. The

people from that environment got shock collared and now they don't want to say anything in case they end up breaking promises.

So for our team we have rules. If you haven't seen something in the game working then you don't talk about it. If it's in the game working then we talk about it, and with a no bullshit attitude. Now these aspects may change, but we figure if we err on being upfront then people will forgive us if we screw up a bit, but if we screw up a lot then they shouldn't forgive us. In general we should only be doing stuff where we can put out money where our mouths are.

You've spoken previously about how important metrics are when designing MMORPGs. Is there ever a danger of relying too much on metrics?

There are three major sources



Quest.ng with players who have a different Path to you will unlock additional gameplay opportunities

that we use: direct feedback from people playing the game, logs [that are produced as people play the game] as sometimes people don't say or don't know what's bugging them, so we dig in there and do the analysis, and the final one is the developer's gut – what they think is good for the game in the long haul.

Some things are flexible based on user feedback and some things that are not. We're passionate about our combat system for instance. We enjoy it and enough of our fans enjoy it too, so it's okay if someone says 'I don't want action combat, I want to be able to control everything with one hand, hold my baby in the other or go have a sandwich in the middle of combat'. A lot of games have succeeded with sandwich combat, but we're not sandwich combat or baby combat. You'll need both hands on the mouse and

keyboard, dodging and moving, intentionally sucking the most XP out of battles. It's okay if some people don't like that. Getting that balance of what your passion is, what the logs are telling you and what the players are telling you isn't trivial.

It's a matter of mixing high-level vision with practicality. Also sometimes it's about listening and taking the time to change. Short Betas don't work. Show me a game with a short Beta that has succeeded? It's pretty damn rare! You need to be out there and you need to be making sure you're actually getting feedback and listening to it. Every six weeks we do a ginormous



Guess what? A couple of million users playing your game are generally smarter than you

INTERVIEW



Wildstar's campaign is set entirely on Nexus, but Carbone have been coy on future adventures heading to other planets.

patch which contains between 40 and 70 pages of patch notes, and that's a lot of new stuff added to the game.

It's all about listening to feedback and polishing stuff up before it ever sees the light of Beta. We look at this stuff in a great level of detail internally; we tune it up before it goes 'public live', and then it gets tuned up again before it goes into the shipping product. Managing that kind of process for 300 hours of content is tough.

There's a reason why most games screw up. It's definitely challenging to do all that, but the nice benefit of our team is that most of us have done it before. That is a luxury, especially as it takes five/six years to make an MMO.

Another bone of contention with Wildstar is the game's shard size, with each world capping out at 7,000 players. Is that still the case?

We did a stress test with 1,900 players confirmed on the servers, running at about 10% capacity, so we can have a decent number of people per shard. More importantly, tests like that make sure the hardware doesn't throw up and puke with numbers that are out of your control. Some games are limited just by that factor, but for us we want to make sure that we have enough density and that our world feels alive.

Our team is about 150 people and when we all run around on the server it feels empty, but that's because the world is designed for thousands of players. We want a level of density that makes the world feel alive, yet not too busy that players are queuing up to kill a particular boss. That's something we'll tweak in Beta for sure, because every game is different.

We're different because people are in housing a good chunk of the time. We have battlegrounds



you can go into that are low level, also dungeons for low level players etc. We've designed dungeons so that they're big enough that a lot of people can be in those if they want. That implies that we want to have a lot of people per shard to have a good density of folks there, but exactly what that number is we'll figure out during Beta.

What sort of gamer do you want to play Wildstar?

There are two markets that we want. The market we don't care about is if we drag another user from another MMO. We don't care if we get a single WoW user – why would you leave the game you love? That leaves two big groups: people looking for something new and former MMO players.

Even good games churn about 5% - 7% [of population] per month, and so that means if there's three million people



Short Betas don't work. Show me a game with a short Beta that succeeds. It's pretty damn rare



INTERVIEW



Houses in *Wildstar* aren't only about showing off wealth. Players can grow crafting items here and earn XP while offline.

playing *WoW* today, that many people will churn out of the game every 20 months. Even if some of those people are recaptured, those numbers end up meaning about 12 million have played *WoW* and about 3 million currently are. Guess what market I'd rather go after? The 3 million who are playing *WoW* or the 9 million who have played it, enjoyed it and left?

I love that market of people who have left MMO games. You see them try all the big games when they first come out. Look at the whopping 3.5 million people who tried *SWTOR* [*Star Wars: The Old Republic*]. The goal isn't to sell 3 million boxes though, but to retain those guys for the long haul because that's

where your game succeeds.

We're nicely incentivised in this business in that only good games make money versus the boxed game world where you could market the crap out of a bad game and still make a bunch of money off it. That doesn't work for MMOs. You can market it, but once released everybody floods in once and flocks out a month later and you lose all your money. That's actually a good thing, as having Darwinian fitness in our business encourages us to make good games and awards that with money – I like that!

So market number one is ex-MMO players, and market number two is those who have never played an MMO before. If we were to choose we'd go for the hardcore market, as we assume the market isn't as simplistic as many games would suggest. *WoW* is a complex game and it did just dandy.

The goal isn't to sell three million boxes, but to retain those guys for the long haul



Carbine Studios are promising a three-week content update schedule for Wildstar. With Guild Wars 2 going for a two-week update cycle, do you think your plan is frequent enough?

It's how quickly you can make a quality update and not shoot yourself in your own foot.

The 'Update Arms Race' already happened in Asia, and I think in the West we're following that trend. In Asia they had a three-four month update cycle for their MMOs, then another game did a two-month update cycle and they got more users. Then someone did a monthly update cycle, and now several of the games over there have weekly updates/patches. The reason is that when you do an update you see an uptake in the number of users, and an uptake in retention when people don't leave.

People will find out where their sweet spot is. *League of Legends*

has been so successful with that three-week cycle. *Guild Wars 2* is going to up the ante to two weeks – that's as fast as they can get and that's hard!

The way ArenaNet is set up is that there's 19 different teams, all of which are working in parallel and adding different stuff in branches, and every two weeks they choose the cool things out of the 19 sub-teams to add into the next patch. There's a constant flow of new stuff going in. That's very compelling to users and that's very hard to do as a developer. ArenaNet will do it because they're all kinds of awesome, but that's very hard for the market to mirror. There's definitely movement towards faster updates coming from other competitors as well.

The 'Update Arms Race' has begun! Expect more Wildstar chat and a hands-on preview in next month's issue. ■



GAME ON

DLC & UGC Round-up

BioShock Infinite: Burial at Sea



PUB: 2K Games
DEV: Irrational Games
ETA: TBA

This month, Ken Levine finally revealed the complete DLC plans for *BioShock Infinite*, and as you'd expect they're rather exciting. The first set of DLC, titled *Clash in the Clouds*, is simply a wave-based survival mode with players having to utilise specific weapons, vigors and tactics in order to take down regular enemies and boss characters in purpose-built arenas.

The second and third DLC packs are considerably more exciting and form the basis of an all-new adventure in the *BioShock* universe starring Elizabeth and

Booker DeWitt, titled *Burial at Sea*. This new side-story is set back in the underwater city of Rapture on the eve of the glass-shattering civil war breaking out. Oh, Irrational you do spoil us. ■



iRacing: Lotus '49



PUB: Racing
DEV: iRacing
OUT NOW

The Lotus '49 isn't a car, it's a beast! Its mechanical construction may look crude, but it has enough torque to shame a modern Formula One car, and it has



the kind of thick tyres which would make Christopher Nolan's modern-day Batmobile jealous. This machine isn't like any other car on *iRacing*, which is perhaps why the developers have taken so very long to add it to the service.

Well, it's finally out now and it has to be the most challenging vehicle we've ever had the unbridled joy of getting our hands on. Skittish in corners, shaky at high speed and ready to swap ends at a moment's notice, this car sorts the real racers from the heavy footed pretenders. Try it out at your peril! ■

Skyrim: Falskaar



DEV: Alexander J Velicky
FIND IT: <http://skyrim.falskaar.com>
OUT NOW

If you're gunning for a job at a major games developer then there are few better ways to secure a job interview than to make a fantastic mod. That's exactly what 19 year old Alexander J Velicky did with *Falskaar*, a gigantic mod for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, which adds a new 25-hour long campaign to Bethesda's game along with new characters, voiced dialogue and dozens of quests.

It isn't just the amount of content that makes this unofficial expansion such a must download, it's the quality of it. The voiceacting in particular is absolutely brilliant, and the story design rivals that of any official DLC for *Skyrim*. It's worth mentioning that

Alexander recruited 29 voice actors to star in the game and they're all superb. *Falskaar* is nothing short of a stunning achievement, and it proves once and for all that developers should support modding as much as they can to secure future talent. ■

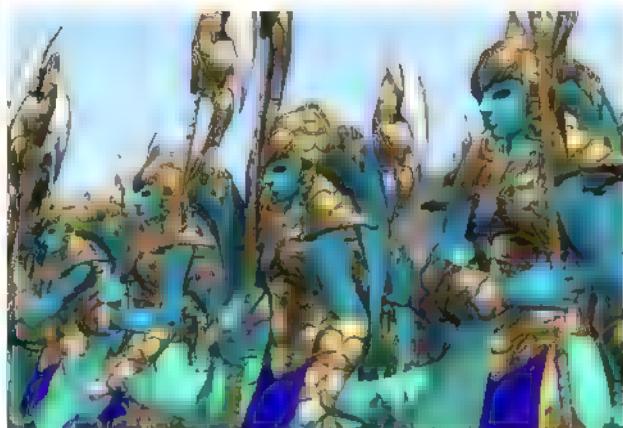


Hyrule: Total War



DEV: Parallel Projects
FIND IT: <http://www.moddb.com/mods/hyrule-total-war>
OUT NOW

If you've ever wondered what would happen if all the different races of *Hyrule* rocked up and had a massive fight, this total conversion mod for *Medieval: Total*



War II offers up exactly that. Obviously this content isn't officially sanctioned by Nintendo (when is it ever really?) but it does feature a rather nifty premise of all previous wars between Zora Dominion, Gerudo, Gohma and Goron forces being rendered null and void, thanks to the Hero of Time (more commonly known as Link) returning to the past altering the time line forever.

Races are split into factions and all the major enemy types from *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask* feature. This mod is still being developed, but the team behind it has already released a feature complete build. They're still bug fixing though, so beware of any quirks in the code. ■

Planetside 2: Hossin



PUB: Sony Online
Entertainment
DEV: In-house
ETA: Summer

Like *Guild Wars 2*, *League of Legends* and other purely online experiences, SOE have been very active with *Planetside 2* as of late, offering new content to players of their free-to-play shooter every two weeks. Next up for fans of this series will be an all-new swampy continent named 'Hossin' which will be added to the game for free over the coming months. The fourth new playable area, after Amerish, Indar and Esamir, is currently in closed Beta. Aside from a new, mostly green

aesthetic, the brand-new continent offers up a special kind of new interlink facility which boasts light bridges that only allow the faction which is defending said facility safe passage. ■



Guild Wars 2: Queen's Jubilee



PUB: NCsoft
DEV: ArenaNet
OUT NOW

ArenaNet are continuing to impress with their ambitious fortnightly update schedule for *Guild Wars 2*, and this one is as big as it comes. Queen Jennah of Kryta is celebrating her 10-year rule in the human

capital known as Divinity's Reach, and characters of all creeds, nationalities and class are invited.

This update brings a multitude of new events, loot and one special mini-pet, but it's the permanent improvements that have caught our eye. Features like a free currency wallet for all characters, bonus loot bags for killing Champion class enemies, the ability to assign permanent finisher combat moves to characters and a new graphics module which will lighten visual load when battles get too hectic. Not too shabby, and as usual this update is totally free. ■



Battlefield 2: Project Reality 1.0



DEV: Project Reality Team
FIND IT: <http://www.realitymod.com>
OUT NOW

After eight years in development, twenty-one releases, thousands of development hours and an Olympic-sized swimming pool of blood, sweat and tears, the *Battlefield 2* mod *Project Reality* has



officially reached the coveted 1.0 status. What does this mean? Well, it signals that the *Project Reality* team are finally ready to call their mod, which brings dozens of improvements to *Battlefield 2*, complete.

This mod adds new factions, maps, game modes, weapons, vehicles, skins and anything else you can think of to the core *Battlefield 2* experience, making it a much more realistic and surprisingly beautiful. Mods have extended the life of *Battlefield 2* long after the developer behind the game, DICE, moved onto further sequels. Give this old girl another run out and see just how much she's evolved. ■

Star Trek Armada 3



DEV: ST Armada 3 Dev Group
FIND IT: www.moddb.com/mods/star-trek-armada-3
ETA: TBD

You know a mod idea is a good one when it spawns not one sequel but two. *Star Trek Armada 3* is set to bring Federation and Klingon factions to the acclaimed 4x space strategy game, *Sins of a Solar Empire: Rebellion*, with more factions and ships from the Star Trek universe due post-launch.

Despite releasing new gameplay footage of high-res models in action, there's still a great deal of development left to do on this mod, but the team behind it have a proven track record, and the work they've

already completed is absolutely stunning. Even *Star Trek Online* doesn't have models as beautiful as these, so hurry up guys, we want to have a play! ■



ISSUE 09

NEXT MONTH



GAMESCOM 2013 REPORT



NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS

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**ISSUE 9:
SEPT
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